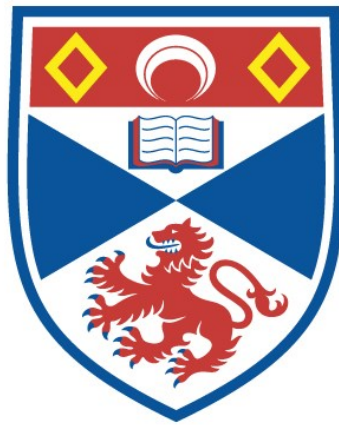


"¡YO SOY AYMARA, YO SOY CALLE!"  
A STUDY OF YOUNG PEOPLE RE-IMAGINING INDIGENEITY  
AND RESISTING MARGINALISATION IN EL ALTO, BOLIVIA

Charlotte Rose Harrison

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD  
at the  
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# **“¡Yo Soy Aymara, Yo Soy Calle!”**

**A Study of Young People Re-Imagining Indigeneity and  
Resisting Marginalisation in El Alto, Bolivia**

**Charlotte Rose Harrison**

**PhD in Social Anthropology**

**The University of St Andrews**

**2013**



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## Abstract

This thesis explores the new self-narratives which are currently being created by young *alteños* with experience of living and/or working on the streets. These young people are projecting their visions for the future and challenging their marginal status by going back to their roots, looking to the history, myths, legends and practices of their ancestors for inspiration. They are constantly affirming and reaffirming their connections both to the older generations and to *Pachamama* (Mother Earth). These connections, rather than being threatened by the urbanity of their present existence, are actually enhanced by it. Specifically, this thesis addresses the creativity employed by young *alteños* as they make a claim to modernity through working as shoe-shiners, conducting rituals such as the *ch'alla* to *Pachamama*, participating in festivals to create collectivity and belonging, and politicising indigenous culture in hip-hop at La Casa Juvenil de las Culturas Wayna Tambo in El Alto. This thesis explores the hopes and ambitions of young *alteños*; the ways they conceive of the future. Whilst it is true that the Presidency of Evo Morales has acted as a catalyst in the processes of re-evaluation of indigenous culture currently underway in Bolivia, this thesis proposes that, in the case of young people in El Alto, they do not merely accept his authority, but are constantly questioning, challenging and - where necessary - opposing, the changes introduced. Therefore, this thesis investigates the ways in which young *alteños* navigate and re-imagine categories of “indigeneity,” “authenticity” and “modernity” - how they affect and are affected by them in their everyday lives. It asks what it means to be young and Aymara today, in El Alto, and argues that there is no contradiction being both 'Aymara' and 'Street.' In using a youth-centred methodology, this thesis aims to give a direct voice to these young people and weight to their claims as agents of change in contemporary Bolivia.



*"In this pilgrimage in search of modernity I lost my way at many points only to find myself again. I returned to the source and discovered that modernity is not outside but within us. It is today and the most ancient antiquity; it is tomorrow and the beginning of the world; it is a thousand years old and yet newborn.....We pursue modernity in her incessant metamorphoses yet we never manage to trap her. She always escapes: each encounter ends in flight"*

Octavio Paz 1990

*'Memory, history: far from being synonyms, they are opposites. Memory is life, borne by living groups and in their names, it is in permanent flux, open to the dialectic of remembering and of forgetting, unconscious of its successive deformations, vulnerable to all of its uses and manipulations, susceptible to long periods of latency and to sudden revitalisations. History is the always problematic and incomplete reconstruction of that which is no longer. Memory is a still-active phenomenon, a living link to the eternal present; history, a representation of the past..... Memory is rooted in the concrete, in space, gesture, image and object. History only attaches itself to temporary continuities, to evolution and to the relations between things'*

Pierre Nora 1984



## Acknowledgements

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, for their constant love and support; for being with me throughout this rather long journey and helping me deal with a multitude of unexpected challenges ranging from altitude to academia: To my mother, for unwavering enthusiasm, interest and energy and to my father for having faith and always saying “Go for it!” Thank you also to my brother, Dan, for visiting me in Bolivia - for wholeheartedly embracing the standard anthropological methodology of 'participation observation' and for coming back down the mountain. Thank you to all the shoe-shiners of Fundación Nuevo Día and the association Los Heroés, particularly Hernán and Pablo, for friendship and teaching me how to survive the street. Thank you to Abraham Bojorquéz and all the young alteños at Wayna Tambo and the students of UPEA and UMSA who, over many hours, shared their lives. Thank you to Yu-Shan Liu, for camaraderie through the ups and downs of the PhD experience and for always pushing me on. To Mattia Fumanti, who became my principal supervisor in the middle of the writing-up phase, for finding structure in the chaos. Thanks also to Stephanie Bunn, my second supervisor, and to my examiners, Stan Frankland and Maggie Bolton. Finally, a great thank you to Michael for teaching me (among many things) patience and perseverance - and for helping me make sense of a shamefully neglected bibliography.



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## **Introduction**

This thesis captures a critical moment in the lives of some of the most marginalised young people living in the city of El Alto; a moment characterised by rapid change due to the forces of globalisation and a powerful indigenous reawakening spurred on by mobilisations of both indigenous and non-indigenous Bolivians. It explores the new self-narratives which are currently being created by young *alteños* with experience of living and/or working on the streets. These young people are projecting their visions for the future by going back to their roots, using the values and practices of the older generations combined with elements of global capitalism and transnationalism to re-imagine indigeneity and so challenge their marginal status. Specifically, this thesis addresses the creativity employed by young *alteños* as they make a claim to modernity through working as shoe-shiners, conducting rituals and participating in festivals to create collectivity and belonging, and politicising indigenous culture in hip-hop. Since globalisation is associated with disjunctive sets of “flows” of people, goods, images, and ideas, it seems possible that hope can increase in the contemporary context (Cole and Durham 2008: 16). In the rapid shifts of late capitalism that quickly make certain kinds of knowledge obsolete, young people are increasingly central to social processes of hope and the production of new knowledge. This thesis explores the hopes and ambitions of young *alteños*; the ways they conceive of the future. Rather than focus upon the academic notion of modernisation as a developmental stage, which all societies must go through in the context of world capitalism (mostly maintained by theoreticians and policy makers), my interest lies with the more popular understandings of “modernisation,” i.e. what young *alteños* interpret to be “modern.” This “modernity” is understood primarily as “progress,” technological innovation, urban services

(electricity, running water), global communications (trains, planes, and cars, fax machines and the Internet), and, more broadly, the process of incorporation into the wider national and international context.

Within the municipality of El Alto, ninety-four percent of youth identify themselves with an indigenous ethnic group; the majority of these claim to be Aymara.<sup>1</sup> For young *alteños*, the re-imagining of indigeneity is a constant process of negotiation between past and future, 'roots' and 'routes,' local and global. As stated by Appadurai, it is through the 'inherent debatability of the past' that cultures find a way not only to 'talk about themselves' but also to change (Appadurai 1981: 201, 218). Rather than viewing culture as rooted in a distant past, and as such only partially translatable, it is seen in this thesis as the creative individual and collective responses to everyday life and the politics of contemporary society. The street may be considered a marker of identity, a boundary where public and private meet, where marginality is reconfigured, where a sense of community thrives, and where the performance of indigeneity is spatially and temporally mapped. In this thesis the 'street' is not an 'inert backdrop against which social practices unfold' (Pile and Keith 1997: 101) but a 'lived space' (Soja 1997), a site for development of cultural identity. The term 'street' is used as a metaphor for all public outdoor places in which the young *alteños* involved in this research conduct their working and social activities, such as roads, alleyways, walkways, shopping areas and derelict sites. Through an exploration of the ways in which the concept of indigeneity is used by these young people as an instrument of change, this thesis asks what it means to be indigenous Aymara in El Alto today.<sup>2</sup> It ultimately argues that there is no

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1 (Yapu 2008)

2 Such negotiation between modernity and tradition, urban and rural, was of particular interest to the Manchester School, which focused upon the ways in which migrants in particular, in South Africa, were able to straddle the colonial world and the world back home. The Kalela Dance by Clyde Mitchell is a

contradiction in being 'Aymara' and 'Street.'

Throughout the last five hundred years indigenous peoples in Bolivia, as in much of Latin America, have been ostracised and denied equal rights and citizenship. In the last two decades, the concept of indigeneity has moved increasingly from the periphery of the political arena to centre stage. Even though there has been a steady increase in 'indigenous mobilisation' in Bolivia during this time, it has changed profoundly in scope and content; the marches, rallies and public protests of new social movements serve as potent expressive vehicles where culture is used instrumentally and the "indigenous" heritage of Bolivia's diverse popular sectors is on full display. Indigenous movements in Latin America are increasingly destabilising the meanings of modernity itself (Abercrombie 1991; Albó 1996, 2002; Albro 2006a, 2006b, 2006c, 1998a; Jackson and Warren 2005; Canessa 2006). Individuals are embracing or contesting the various images and languages of indianness and indigeneity in highly sophisticated ways and indigeneity is being used by marginalised groups as a tool for empowerment. As Warren and Jackson say, indigenous leaders, NGO workers, activists and Bolivian people themselves are all navigating among politically charged and contested discursive categories like "indigenusness," "authenticity," and "modernity" (Warren and Jackson 2005).

Evo Morales - who is Aymara and the first indigenous person to lead the country since Bolivian Independence - and his party, Movement towards Socialism (MAS), have ushered in a new era of indigenous politics, upending historical patterns of white elite

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classic on the Manchester School analysis of the relationship between continuity and change (Mitchell 1956).

rule (Perreault 2008). With fifty-four percent of votes obtained on the 18th of December 2005, the victory represented a crushing defeat for the traditional political parties of *criollos* and *mestizos*.<sup>3</sup> A massive overhaul of the Constitution, which was passed in 2008 and came into force in 2009, radically increased the rights and autonomy of the country's indigenous population, which makes up more than sixty percent of the total.<sup>4</sup> Explaining his efforts to "refound the country," Morales has pronounced, "Let us walk together to create a new country – a *pachakuti*!" The Andean cosmological idea of a "*pachakuti*" refers to the overturning of the earth, and to cyclical time, where what once was will soon be again – an indigenous future (Albro 2006a).

The year 2004 was the last year of the UN Decade for Indigenous Peoples and this decade has seen not only the UN but the World Bank prioritise the position of indigenous people; it has witnessed the ratification of ILO Convention 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples by most Latin American countries which has been successfully used by indigenous people; it has also seen countless NGOs channel aid to indigenous groups for political as well as economic development. The World Bank, the ILO and the UN all underline the importance of self-identification in their definitions of what it is to be indigenous. The international language of indigenous rights has therefore become a powerful one for many groups to articulate their concerns (especially given the failure of more traditional class-based politics to deliver for many people). Until recently, for many urban Aymara it has been important to distinguish themselves from the rural population. Widmark (2003) has described how, in the urban

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<sup>3</sup> Commonly, the term *criollo* is used to designate white descendants of European settlers, whereas the term *mestizos* refers to mixed bloods.

<sup>4</sup> Among many other changes, the document empowers Bolivia's indigenous and Afro-Bolivian communities, establishes broader access to basic services, education and healthcare, limits the size of large land purchases, expands the role of the state in the management of natural resources and the economy and prohibits the existence of US military bases on Bolivian soil (Dangl 2007).

area, migrants are confronted with different, sometimes contradictory, ways of dealing with Aymara identity and culture; some groups and individuals have tended to under-communicate or drop traits or aspects that they believe are associated with the (for some, 'backward') Aymara ethnic and cultural identity in favour of what is perceived as a 'western' or 'modern' culture. According to Harris, it appears that 'indian - ness' is so bound up in a particular lifestyle, both from the emic and etic perspective, that it does not easily survive the move to the city (Harris 1995). Albó has classified these people as belonging to an "Aymara urban subculture," - that is, people who do not identify with peasants or Indians but who maintain a cultural style that is different from the rest of the city (Albó 1980: 506). Today, however, *alteños* and young *alteños* in particular are increasingly identifying as Indian. The concept of 'Aymara subculture' is no longer feasible. The majority of the inhabitants of El Alto, who today number almost one million, are first to third generation migrants from the Aymara-speaking countryside. With the largest concentration of Aymara and indigenous speakers in the country, El Alto has been described as the 'Aymara capital' (Albó 2006; Arbona 2007; Lazar 2008).

### **Aspirational Aymara City**

The Aymara are a highland people of approximately two million inhabitants occupying the Andean altiplano, a high plateau with a median altitude of 3750 metres (12,300 feet) above sea level, stretching from southern Peru through northwest Bolivia into the northern part of Chile. The Aymara dominated the central highlands of Bolivia from the end of the twelfth century until the arrival of the Spaniards in the sixteenth century (Klein 1982: 15).<sup>5</sup> They have for five centuries been in contact with and periodically

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<sup>5</sup> During this period, a number of Aymara-speaking 'nations' developed, and 'it appears as if each nation

suppressed by other groups; the Incas, the Conquistadors, the Castellanos. Throughout the different administrations, including the Inca domination and the Spanish conquest, the majority of the Aymara population continued to live by subsistence agriculture. The Bolivian Aymara have been denied access to many of the national resources. During the two hundred years of extraction of enormous amounts of silver from Bolivian mines, the Aymara, at the price of ruthless exploitation, were completely separated from any part of the wealth. The fifteen year long War of Independence, which ended in 1825 with the proclamation of the Republic of Bolivia did not actively involve, nor greatly affect, the Aymara; their status remained generally unchanged (Klein 1982). While the majority of early research of Aymara peoples has focused upon rural inhabitants,<sup>6</sup> more recent work has begun to address this population in an urban context exploring themes such as community and collectivity, change to lifestyle with rural to urban migration and contemporary indigenous mobilisation (Buechler and Buechler 1996; Gill 2000; Albó 2002, 2006, 2011; Mamani Ramírez 2005; Lazar 2008). Studies have also been produced by PIEB (Programa de Investigación Estratégica en Bolivia), a local publishing house in La Paz, with the purpose of increasing general understanding of the

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was divided into two separate kingdoms' (Klein 1982: 15). In the 1460s the Quechua-speaking Incas extended their influence over Aymara territory. The Aymara were unable to unite their separate 'nations,' and gradually lost their independence by the end of that decade. However, the arrival of the Incas changed little of the social, economic, and political organisation of the Aymara kingdoms. Retaining the traditional rulers and contenting themselves with extracting surpluses through tribute payments, the Incas did little to disturb the fabric of Aymara life. While incorporated in the Inca empire, the Aymara were allowed to retain their own language (Klein 1982: 19).

<sup>6</sup> From the early years of the Spanish conquest up to the present time numerous descriptions of the Aymara people have appeared, starting with Cieza de Leon (1553). In the twentieth century several ethnographers covered the Aymara social structure, cosmology, rites, and kinship, with Tschopic (1946, 1951), La Barre (1948), and Steward and Faron (1959) as the most prominent. From the mid-1960's the focus was on communal relations and the agrarian reform (Carter 1964); on networks and the fiesta system (Buechler 1967, 1968); on economy and politics (Murra 1975); on economy and social processes (Orlove and Custred 1980); on ideology and social issues (Nash and Corradi 1977; Nash 1979); on social and cultural change (Hickman 1963; Lewellen 1978); and on language and education in relation to culture and society (Hardman 1978, 1981; Briggs 1976) as well as extensive language research by Hardman, Vasquez and Yapita (1975). Work has also been produced on Andean metaphor, ritual and cosmology, for example by Bastien (1978), Isbell (1977), and Urton (1981), covering the Andean region in general, mixed Aymara and Quechua accounts or mainly Quechua beliefs. Several Aymara studies in the fields of ecological, agrarian and nutritional anthropology have been carried out, for example Collins (1981). Also see Carter and Mamani (1982) on the individual and community in Aymara culture and Albó (1986).

city of El Alto. A number of these focus particularly upon young people, addressing, for instance, the reconstruction of collective identities in youth organisations in El Alto and the political subjectivity of young *alteños* (Méndez and Pérez 2007; Samanamud et al. 2007).

El Alto has evolved in a hostile environment, at approximately 4,100 metres above sea level, where the air is thin and temperatures fluctuate between fifteen degrees celsius during the day and minus five at night. The sacred and spectacular mountain, Illimani, looms over the bowl (or cauldron - *caldera*) in which La Paz sits, at 500 metres below El Alto, and the (decreasingly) snow-capped peaks of Chacaltaya and Huayna-Potosi are visible in the far distance. It is a buzzing, vibrant city, bursting with contrasts and contradictions. In recent decades the steady increase in migration has produced a dearth of jobs in the formal sector causing the informal and service sectors of the economy to expand. Since what constitutes ‘informal economy’ is difficult to define precisely, with the ‘formal’ and ‘informal’ sectors being so interdependent (Hart 1973; Rivera Cusicanqui 2002), here I use a broad definition as characterized by small-scale commerce that is unregulated and untaxed by the government, with people mostly self-employed rather than receiving a wage. Given the limits to the turnover of material goods, there has been a shift from the production of goods to the production of services. The *alteño* economy of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century also shows elements of what Hardt and Negri call ‘informatization,’ i.e. no-one is selling concrete things but services such as photocopying, cell phone calls, translations, transcriptions, internet access (Hardt and Negri 2000: 280). The majority of the population of El Alto, including working children and youth, is integrated into fundamentally informal economic activities (Méndez & Pérez 2007: 39). The high rate of households headed by women, the lack of basic



services, and high poverty levels combine to drive the young to La Paz, searching for work in an attempt to both help support their families and pay for their own studies.

In the past decade, the failings of El Alto have been frequently commented upon: “Due to lack of planning and funding, many areas currently lack access to basic services such as rubbish collection, sewage connections and potable water. The city has low levels of education and health provision and an illiteracy rate which is the highest of the urban areas in Bolivia” (Merkle 2003) and “El Alto is one of the poorest cities in Bolivia; an estimated four out of each five residents live in poverty conditions that do not allow them to meet their basic nutritional needs” (Méndez & Pérez 2007: 29). Even today, although El Alto is already Bolivia's second most populous city (after Santa Cruz) and its human development index improved from 0.59 to 0.66 in 2005, it ranks in 47<sup>th</sup> place among the country's municipalities, considerably lower than all the department (state) capitals and other smaller cities (Albó 2011). However, researchers and journalists also describe the way in which years of economic growth and relative stability are changing attitudes as well as fortunes. Writing on Morales’ Bolivia, Palenque (2008) describes the way in which power has shifted to the hands of *alteños*, “The *alteños* are not martyred indians, they are not exploited Indians seeking mystical socialism and the revitalisation of the race and the mountain. They are not even nationalists.....*Alteños* are the first *Collas*<sup>7</sup> to reach the 21<sup>st</sup> century.” There are plans for the city's first supermarkets, shopping malls and cinemas and several large state infrastructure projects, such as a \$234 million cable car system and a double lane highway to Oruro (Popper 2012). Young *alteños* are evidently growing up in a period of intense transformation, with El Alto increasingly being recognised, both in Bolivia and

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<sup>7</sup> *Collas* or *Kollas* are indigenous people of Western Bolivia, Chile and Argentina

internationally, as a symbol of the power of the people; a city exceptional for the determination of its inhabitants to defend their rights and fight for justice and equality, not simply as Bolivian citizens but as Indians.

### **Youth, Indigeneity and Authenticity**

In previous decades, many anthropologists of youth concentrated on the ways in which young people around the world assumed new, culturally recognised roles through ritual activities that dramatized the liminality of youth (Turner 1969; Hebdige 1979). The anthropology of youth today concerns itself with the practices through which culture is produced. It is characterised by its attention to the agency of young people and the ways in which new identities emerge in new cultural formations that creatively combine elements of global capitalism, transnationalism, and local culture. Global youth cultures are developed blending traditional cultural forms into new youth-based styles and practices (Basmenji 2005; Simonsen 2005; Amit-Talai and Wulff 1995; Nilan and Feixa 2006; Virtanen 2012; Pilkington 2003; Eglinton 2012; Hansen 2008). There is not a unique concept of 'youth' but rather a diversity of youth identities and expressions which are continually being (re)constructed by the interaction between agency and structure.

The rapid and increased movements of people, images, and commodities foster global imaginations (Cole and Durham 2008: 9). Giddens (1990) emphasises the transformation of temporality that occurs as the reorganisation of capital, combined with new technologies, alters the relation of time to space. It is indeed true that in recent

years there has been a profound reworking of how space and time are experienced in everyday life, as evidenced by various different lines of inquiry into contemporary social and economic changes (Koselleck 1985; Harvey 1989). In Koselleck's 1985 study of the semantics of historical time, he argues that the idea of the future being different from the past is a temporal structure that emerged in the context of Western modernity. There is a reciprocal interaction between the speed of technological inventions and people's perceptions of the future. Koselleck observes,

“if the contemporary in question detects in his subjective experiential balance an increase in the weight of the future, this is certain to be an effect of the technical-industrial modification of a world that forces upon its inhabitants ever-briefer intervals of time in which to gather new experiences and adapt to changes induced at an accelerating pace” (Koselleck 1985: xxiv).

As discussed by Cole and Durham (2008), youth have come to seem particularly important to globalisation, not only in terms of the spatial relations of globalisation but also the temporal dimensions (Cole and Durham 2008:4). Researchers are increasingly focusing upon the ways in which the young generation conceives of the future and indeed the role of young people in creating the future. Through what Mannheim describes as “fresh contact” (Mannheim 1993), each new generation reshapes existing social and cultural practices into new forms. Children and youth often create new practices by drawing on available resources and transforming them (Cole and Durham 2008: 19). There is good evidence that some of the practices created by youth do become routinized and carry into the future, so these provide an important site for illuminating patterns of social change (Cole and Durham 2008: 18).

The creative responses of youth to new cultural circumstances have been investigated by a number of scholars. Katz (2004), in her longitudinal ethnographic account of rural Sudanese children growing up in Howa, a village in central eastern Arabic-speaking Sudan, explores the way in which global economic changes shift the grounds of the future when many children learn skills that will not help them later on because of rapidly changing environment and labour conditions. She focuses especially on their acquisition and use of environmental knowledge, tracing the effects and responses to capitalist development over a generation and exploring strategies that people use to survive and even to reformulate the conditions and possibilities of their everyday lives. Virtanen (2012) looks at the ways in which current power relations constituted by ethnic recognition, new social contacts, and cooperation with different institutions have shaped the current native youth in Amazonia. The effects of globalisation and neoliberalism on the everyday experiences and future prospects of urban youth in Brazil, Vietnam, and Zambia are examined by Hansen (2008), who explores the ways in which they use their city, spend their time, and prepare themselves for the future. Pilkington (2003) charts how post-Soviet Russia's opening up to the West has been reflected in the cultural practices of its young people. Her research shows that the younger generation has adopted a selection strategy with regard to Western cultural commodities that reflects receptiveness to the global alongside a precious guarding of the local. This thesis builds on such themes of recent youth research. It also contributes to research addressing the role of young people in politics and movements of resistance (de Boeck and Honwana 2005; Varzi 2006; Kurti 2002; Abbink and Van Kessel 2005), exploring the ways in which marginalised young *alteños* engage with their marginalisation in different and unexpected ways, often beyond the simple resistance trope.

In their book 'Creativity and Cultural Improvisation,' Hallam and Ingold (2007) argue that anthropology should challenge rather than reproduce the polarity between novelty and convention, or between the innovative dynamic of the present and the traditionalism of the past, that has long formed such a powerful undercurrent to the discourses of modernity. They challenge the idea that the capacity for creative improvisation is exercised by individuals against the conventions of culture and society and contend that improvisation and creativity are intrinsic to the very processes of social and cultural life (Hallam and Ingold 2007: 19). People everywhere 'construct culture as they go along and as they respond to life's contingencies' (Bruner 1993: 326). 'Improvisation,' as Bruner puts it, 'is a cultural imperative' (Bruner 1993: 322). As Ingold says,

'The past, far from being set off against the present as a repository of finished business, is continually active in the present, pressing against the future. In this pressure lies the work of memory, imagined not as a register or drawer in which records of past events are filed away, but as the guiding hand of consciousness into a succession of fragments, each initiated by a wilfully creative (or innovative) act of design followed by its determined execution' (Ingold 1986: 210).

Migration has long-term effects, especially impacting on children and young people's present and future everyday life (Kaufman et al 2002; Katz 2004; Punch 2007). Much has been written on first generation migrant youth, especially in Africa and Latin America (Ansell and Van Blerck 2004; Bastia 2005; Ansell and Van Blerck 2007; Carpena-Mendez 2007; Punch 2007). This thesis focuses on second and third generation migrants who were born in El Alto. Young alteños can be considered a particularly vulnerable group within Bolivia in relation to other youth since, being indigenous and children of migrants, they have suffered and continue suffering the most from

marginalisation and poverty. They experience problems of unemployment and lack of integrated development policies and are therefore forced to seek ways of surviving very early in their lives. These young people also experience ambivalence and tension between the values and models proposed by their rural-urban migrant parents and those they find in the city. This is an experience that is common to other second generation migrants (Amit-Talai and Wulff 1995; Mandel 1995; Anwar 1998; Rumbaut and Portes 2001; Andall 2002; Portes and Rumbaut 2005; Thomson and Crul 2007). Some of the most powerful influences on young *alteños* come from the older generations – the parents and grandparents of these marginalised young people; their knowledge, values and practices. Calestani (2012) describes the prevalence of discrimination in El Alto, where she conducted research with young people in 2003. At that time wearing a tie and speaking Spanish were associated with progress, while dressing *de pollera* or wearing a *poncho* and speaking Aymara were considered as ways of refusing that progress. Calestani writes about the pressure from educational institutions to leave 'old customs' and embrace a new 'modern' identity, to make the country more homogeneous through the young generations. As Calestani says, this ambition of the ruling elite had been in place since the mid-nineteenth century. *Alteños* and especially young *alteños*, in 2003, still experienced this national project of homogenising the country as a new process and felt caught between different models and orientations, called upon to make a decision between individual motivations, state institutions and the indigenous culture of their parents.

Today, in El Alto, the knowledge of older generations is being kept alive through practices of “living tradition,” for example the *ch'alla*, a ritual offering to *Pachamama*, participation in festivals, and maintenance of connections to the natal village of older

generations. Knowledge is passed down from parents and grandparents and reformulated by young *alteños* as they use and give meaning to traditionally rural practices. Such participation creates a sense of belonging and solidarity amongst marginalised young people, enabling them to challenge their marginal status. Weiss, writing on youth in Africa, observes that as people negotiate the emerging and shifting possibilities of inclusion or exclusion in new forms of community, an important question for them is not only how to join but also “what will the [criteria for participation] be tomorrow?” (2004: 8). Weiss explains how the energies of youth are less frequently in conflict with the values of collectivity, and even solidarity, than they are restless, often frustrated, searches for engagement, commitment and community (2004: 14). This is the case in El Alto, with young people maintaining community and close relationships with family, yet also searching for something more meaningful with which to engage; channels through which their voices will be heard and through which they may contribute to processes of change. The concept of indigeneity is a powerful tool for young *alteños* as they grapple with the forces pulling them back towards the past and those propelling them inevitably, and ever more rapidly, into the future. This thesis asks how young *alteños* navigate and re-imagine the categories of “indigenous,” “authenticity” and “modernity” - how they affect and are affected by them in their everyday lives.

Since Hobsbawm made the indisputable observation that “traditions which appear or claim to be old are often quite recent in origin and sometimes invented” (1983:1), the term *invented tradition* has been widely used in defining perpetually changing cultural practices in permanent states of negotiation and redefinition. Traditions do not have to be old to be claimed by a group of people as “authentic” and part of their heritage; they

are invented and claimed because “they normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past” (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983: 1). In recognising the usefulness of Hobsbawm’s critique of the concept of tradition, I am also aware of the problems in introducing the notion of invention into the sphere of the cultural practices of *alteño* youth. *Invention* is a term too closely related to the idea of discovery. Novelty and originality would seem to be requirements of something “invented.” Among young *alteños* the traditions I discuss are not sudden fabrications; they are re-elaborations of previously invented and reinvented cultural practices that go back as far as the Pre-Inca colonial and republican periods and extend into contemporary times. This approach avoids the usual preconception that modernity will inevitably bring homogenisation to world cultures, bringing them all into a single process, a global system, in which local cultural differences will disappear. The fact is that, notwithstanding the astounding development of capitalism, world markets, mass communications, and mass migration throughout the world, local cultures and ethnic differences continue to exist, struggle, and create novel lifestyles, which are, in turn, products of both “tradition” and “modernity.”

One of the central paradoxes of the use of the term 'indigenous' is that it refers to people with a primordial identity, an enduring attachment to place, and cultures which have continued over centuries and millennia even as the concept itself is relatively new.<sup>8</sup> Indigenous peoples and their cultures are seen as the last redoubts of local difference against the globalisation of culture, but the understanding that indigenous people in Canada and Indonesia and West Africa and Brazil share a common experience as

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<sup>8</sup> See Niezen (2003) but also definitions by the World Bank (Davis and Williams 2001:5; see also Revised Draft Operational Policy on Indigenous Peoples (Revised Draft OP 4.10, 2005), the International Labour Organisation (ILO 169, Article One) and the United Nations (Martinez Cobo, 1986; see also DOCIP Update, No. 13, march/April 1996, Geneva)



'indigenous peoples' is itself a product of globalisation (Hodgson 2002). Indigeneity is both local and global and can be used flexibly as a political tool. Authenticity is secondary to the political power which may be wielded under the banner of indigeneity. Essentialising the Indian and the *mestizo* into rigid categories in which the global, the cosmopolitan, and the international appear as disrupting elements is an outdated practice. In the same way that the limits between tradition and modernity have vanished to a large extent, the differences between the agents of such paradigms have also become blurred (Romero 2001: 132).<sup>9</sup> Young *alteños* switch positions within the debate over the past and authenticity and even cross cultural lines whenever they feel like it, in the name of Andean cosmopolitanism and globalism. Mobile identities may be regarded as search mechanisms and also a means of cultural reaffirmation. Young *alteños* are searching for belonging and they find this in their shared indigenous past. As Hannerz has noted, "The cosmopolitan may embrace the alien culture, but he does not become submitted to it. All the time he knows where the exit is" (Hannerz 1996: 104). Young *alteños* take what they want from the modern without forgetting their roots – where they come from and who they really are.

Rather than contributing to the wealth of migration studies which dwell upon the many problems arising from the arrival of poor, semi-skilled people at the margins of metropolitan areas, for example violence, overcrowding, disease, sanitation, and unemployment, I wish to reveal another story - a story of creativity, resourcefulness and determination, which recognises the extraordinary cultural, political and social contributions made by the most marginalised of young *alteños*. Since the majority of the

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<sup>9</sup> Romero (2001) describes the way in which the shifting quality of ethnic identities in the Andes permits cultural identities to change even throughout the course of a lifetime. The mobility of the *cholo*, the Indian peasant who migrates to the city and returns as an urban dweller, with new values and manners, is an example of the identity switching that characterises Andean ethnicity.

population of El Alto, over sixty percent, is under the age of twenty-five (Merkle 2003) and, due to the processes of indigenous reawakening and the re-imagining of indigeneity currently underway among young alteños, this section of the population warrants detailed ethnographic study in its own right. Exploring the lives of these young people entails engaging not only with stories of migration, displacement, and marginality, but also of 'emplacement' and expectations, hopes and social advancement.

## **Methodology**

I conducted fieldwork in La Paz and El Alto between July 2007 and January 2009. I originally planned to live in El Alto but acclimatising to the altitude posed a problem. I therefore decided to make the situation as manageable as possible by living in La Paz and travelling to El Alto by minibus. My research participants and friends were predominantly young alteños with experience of living and/or working on the street. These young people are engaged with many different institutions and organisations, both formal and informal. I conducted multi-sited ethnographic research based on standard anthropological methods of participant observation at the following sites: Fundación Nuevo Día, a local NGO run by and for shoe-shiners; Casa Juvenil de las Culturas Wayna Tambo; UPEA (Universidad Pública de El Alto) and UMSA (Universidad Mayor de San Andrés). In this thesis 'youth' refers to young people in the age range 12 to 30.<sup>10</sup> I am concerned more with social and cultural practices in the life trajectories of young alteños than with their official status. My interest lies in the social

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<sup>10</sup> Nilan and Feixa (2006) explore specific local cultures whilst mediating global mass media and consumption trends of young people around the globe. They define 'youth' as referring to young people in the age range 12 to 35. As they say, this age range indicates the extent to which the cultural age category of 'youth' has expanded to include some who are legally recognised elsewhere in society as children, and some who are legally recognised elsewhere in society as adults (Nilan and Feixa 2006: 1).

construction of identity; in young people as creative social actors.

In El Alto, the younger generation is increasingly appreciating the knowledge and wisdom of their parents and grandparents. As Cole and Durham say, it is often in the relationships between age groups that changes take shape, as people negotiate pragmatically and emotionally to manage the present and to reproduce desirable and livable futures (Cole and Durham 2007: 2). Whilst the focus of this thesis is upon young people in El Alto, it is impossible to study these people in isolation, apart from their parents and grandparents, with whom the majority maintain regular and close contact. My research therefore also entailed conducting interviews with the parents and grandparents of these young people and a number of other adults.

The young people involved in this research are united at one level by their origins and, at another, by their vision of the future and the fact that they are placing increasing emphasis on the use of indigeneity - and Aymara culture in particular - as a political tool; a means of achieving their aims for social and political change. In total this study involved approximately one hundred and fifty young people, including thirty parents and grandparents.

I first conducted fieldwork at Fundación Nuevo Día. A few days after arriving in La Paz, I wandered slowly up the streets through Plaza Alonso de Mendoza to Calle Inca, stopping frequently to catch my breath due to the sudden decrease in oxygen. At the entrance to Fundación Nuevo Día, a local NGO run by and for shoe-shiners, the porter, Don Segundino (or Segu), directed me through the central hall, all tiled and in a state of disrepair, to the balcony upstairs, where he told me I would find the Director. As I

ascended, a young shoe-shiner stumbled towards me, just avoiding a collision as he bounced off the wall and fell in a heap in the stair well. He muttered and pulled his balaclava from his face to reveal a large scar across one cheek. His eyes were empty – the look, which was to become familiar to me, of someone who has been inhaling glue (*clefa*). I explained to the Director, Hernán Olmos, that I wished to conduct research at FND and he suggested that I begin by helping out in the library and kitchen. Nuevo Día provides low cost shoe-shining materials, cheap meals, showers, storage lockers, vocational training such as carpentry or metallurgy, seminars on health and welfare, a television area, as well as educational support in the form of a small library and quiet area for private study. The Foundation is extremely short of funding and donations of food (tuna, rice, wheat and oil) are received from the PMA (Programa Mundial de Alimentación). Lunch and tea are sold to the shoe-shiners for two and one bolivianos. The showers and locker storage also cost one boliviano. With this money FND buys extra food to add to the tuna and rice and pays basic maintenance bills. The majority of the staff work voluntarily and make money working on the streets as shoe-shiners.

Initially, I offered English classes at the library of FND, as a way of getting to know the inner workings of the Foundation and to become more familiar with the shoe-shiners, as well as to give them the chance to become accustomed to my presence. A number of previous researchers had visited and the boys had been involved in a photography project in which they were given cameras to record significant moments, people or places in their daily working lives. Journalists also visited occasionally, so my arrival was met with a number of preconceptions. The shoe-shiners asked what I was doing and my answer was that I was there to do research, teach English and generally help out. I spent most afternoons, between three and five, helping in the kitchen. Between these

hours shoe-shiners from all over La Paz flock to FND to exchange one boliviano for a cup of steamy, thick *api* and a *buñuelo*.<sup>11</sup> Although the dining area is small and can only seat fifty at most, an average day brings around two hundred shoe-shiners - men, women and children - for tea. Helping in the kitchen gave me the opportunity to discuss the latest events at the Foundation, including problematic issues encountered by the workers, as well as to enjoy general jokes and gossip. A number of younger boys often helped in the tea preparation and, as time passed, they became more comfortable and willing to discuss personal subjects such as family and relationships, health and financial troubles, also revealing more about the discrimination they encounter, particularly from the authorities and police.

After about two months at FND I began to spend a few days each week at the field site of Wayna Tambo in El Alto. Wayna Tambo, which in Aymara means “meeting of youth,” is a radio station, cultural centre and unofficial base of the city’s hip-hop scene. It was founded in 1995 with the aim of providing an outlet for artistic creativity to the most marginalised of young *alteños*, those with experience of living and/or working on the street. Wayna Tambo aims to develop communicative and educational activities, with radio supporting modern expressions of indigenous culture through a publishing house, recording label, cultural festivals and creativity workshops. Previously, there were only pirated radios, secret places where youth gathered.

Most young *alteños* aspire to a formal education. There is a general goal, frequently voiced, that a good education will enable them to progress, get ahead in life and ultimately become a professional. (The particular type of profession was rarely

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<sup>11</sup> The ingredients for this thick purple maize drink and doughnut-like snack are provided by the World Food Program (Programa Mundial de Alimentación)

stipulated and my questioning on the matter tended to be met with vague, unformulated answers). A number of the young people involved in this research have previously attended university in El Alto but have been obliged to leave due to the more pressing need to make money. UPEA (Universidad Pública de El Alto) is the main university in El Alto and was founded by the residents themselves. Its students have always been extremely politically active and the university has succeeded in keeping itself going when state support has been barely existent. The main campus is situated in Rio Seco, next to the football pitch where the shoe-shiner associations play their regular Saturday matches. Some of my informants attended UMSA (Universidad Mayor de San Andrés), the largest university in La Paz.

A couple of months after arriving in La Paz I embarked on Aymara lessons with Jose Lara Yapita.<sup>12</sup> Although it would have been preferable to speak to the older generations, particularly grandparents, in their indigenous language, it was fortunately never necessary to speak to anyone in Aymara and indeed, although adults in El Alto do speak Aymara amongst themselves, the majority speak Spanish with their children, and my *alteño* friends always talked amongst themselves in Spanish. The fieldwork for this thesis was therefore conducted entirely in Spanish.

Etheridge Woodson encourages anyone performing fieldwork to think seriously about what they can exchange for access, suggesting that they may teach their skills in observation and analysis, or perhaps give workshops in field research to the young people, as some researchers have attempted to do (Best 2007: 300). She contends that we should involve young people in the process and product as much as is possible and

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<sup>12</sup> Lara Yapita has made a documentary with National Geographic on vanishing languages focusing upon the *Kallawayá*, based at Charazani in the Cordillera Apolobamba.

feasible (Best 2007: 301). Chin also discusses the potential of collaborative research with young people for shifting the ways in which anthropologists view their own work, its importance, and its purpose (Best 2007). Drawing upon Vygotsky's notion of the "zone of proximal development," she aims to show how collaborative research with young people allows both researcher and researched to reach new understandings about their worlds (Best 2007: 269). According to Vygotsky, it is through social interaction that certain important developmental spaces are in fact created, an idea exemplified by his Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD).<sup>13</sup> The ZPD is a conceptual space that emerges in problem-solving interactions between experts and novices. This idea emphasises the active engagement of young people as social agents. Chin here focuses on the transformative and developmental effects on adults who step into the ZPD with children. Vygotsky is concerned with how the more practiced person can facilitate the learning of the novice. Particularly when the activity entails a mutual exploration of unknown territories, zones of proximal development are opened up for all participants: the experience is not one simply of the novice moving toward the position occupied by the expert. As in any dialectical process, the process itself creates change, flow, and transformation so that, as the work proceeds, the very territory in which it takes place is remapped, redrawn, and re-experienced (Best 2007: 282).

This thesis lets the young people speak for themselves, about their problems and their creative and innovative solutions. A participatory methodology was used, with young people being involved as researchers in the collection of information. They conducted interviews with their parents and grandparents, based upon questionnaires (see appendix) which we prepared beforehand in informal workshops, as well as conducting interviews between themselves. In order to give voice to these young *alteños*, at various

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<sup>13</sup> See also Lave and Wenger (1991) and Freire (1970).

points throughout the thesis I have framed selected quotes. This approach, which emphasises the importance of a plurality of voices both in the field and the ethnographic text, is inspired by the work of Bakhtin (1984) and Clifford and Marcus (1986). My research is also based on formal interviews. When I quote these interviews, I use my own transcripts from the tape recordings. I translated the interviews but tried not to change the expressions used by my informants too much, in order to give a real flavour of the language adopted. I conducted interviews and made informal and topically focused observations in places where young people get together, including market settings, work settings, private homes, bars and parks as well as university campuses, football fields and particularly the streets of La Paz and El Alto. In effect, I explored the construction of their urban social and cultural maps as products of their activities and interactions with persons of different generations and classes and across many different institutions and situations.

## **Structure of Thesis**

**Chapter I** is divided into five sections, the first of which describes the history of El Alto and La Paz and the connections between the two, the three main waves of Aymara rural to urban migration, the subsequent limitations on spaces open to indigenous peoples, discrimination and racism against these migrants based on colour, language, income and fashion and problems arising as a result of neoliberal reforms, such as increasing unemployment. It goes on to explain the changes made by Aymara peoples in an effort to integrate and progress in the city. The second section provides an outline of El Alto's unique social and political institutions, such as the federations of *juntas vecinales* (neighbourhood associations) and *juntas escolares* (school associations) and



describes the way in which elements of the *ayllu*, the traditional form of social organisation, have been revived and reinterpreted in El Alto. The third section of this chapter describes the significance of civic mobilisations to the development of a specific alteño identity. It also explains the increasing political significance of the *ayllu* in recent years. Section four outlines the way in which events such as the Gas Wars in 2003 and 2005, following the Water War in Cochabamba in 2000, signified the direct involvement of young alteños in political violence for the first time. The fifth section describes the events leading up to the inauguration of Evo Morales as President and the progress of his party, the MAS (Movimiento al Socialismo).

**Chapter II** discusses the ways in which young alteño shoe-shiners confront racist discrimination as they work on the streets of La Paz. As the population of El Alto is rapidly increasing and unemployment rates are high, these young alteños act to make their working conditions as reasonable as possible. This chapter explores the ways in which they are engaging with modernity by formalising their work, creating associations, attaching themselves to local and foreign NGOs and taking part in workshops. For young alteños, the formalisation of their work into associations and their engagement with NGOs and other agencies may be considered to embody hope. They want their work to be legally recognised and to be treated as equal citizens; to receive social support including access to housing, healthcare and education. These demands may be considered an expression of their right to a modernity. Despite increasing institutionalisation of this informal occupation, young shoe-shiners succeed in simultaneously using creative informal tactics on the street, “geographies of resistance,” so as to inhabit the city, for example through their use of the balaclava and '*coba*,' the coded language of the street. They engage with modernity on their own

terms, voluntarily formalising their work in response to encouragement by Morales to unite as other working groups have done.

**Chapter III** explores the ways in which the concept of indigeneity is being redefined by President Evo Morales and his party, MAS. Focusing particularly upon Morales' participation at the event of Aymara New Year at Tiwanaku, it discusses the use of emblems of indigeneity, such as traditional dress, the *wiphala* (flag of indigenous nations), and the use of *coca* and alcohol in rituals to *Pachamama*. It investigates the ways in which these practices correspond to the processes of re-imagining indigeneity at work among young *alteños*, discussing the extent to which the most marginalised consider Morales as a role model.

**Chapter IV** explores the significance of participation in rituals and festivals and the maintenance of rural connections to marginalised young *alteños*. Focusing upon the festivals of *Alasitas*, *Todos Santos* and Carnival, it demonstrates the ways in which these young people are making the values, practices and beliefs of their parents and grandparents relevant to their lives in the city through “living tradition,” in which change is grounded in continuity (Gadamer 1975; Macintyre 1985). There has been significant change in participation in and practice of traditional rituals between first and third generation migrants as a result of western influences, leading to changed ambitions and aspirations and greater access to education and global media. According to Connerton (2009), 'modernity forgets.' However, through shared memories and the practice of “living tradition,” marginalised young *alteños* continue to assert their identity and to claim rights as indigenous Aymara peoples. This chapter argues that their performance of and participation in rituals and festivals, along with the maintenance of

connections to '*el pueblo*,' the natal village of their parents or grandparents, helps young alteños to negotiate life in the city by providing meaning and a sense of belonging.

**Chapter V** focuses upon the politicisation of culture by young alteños, focusing upon the production of hip-hop at La Casa Juvenil de las Culturas Wayna Tambo. At this youth cultural centre, young alteños create new narratives, re-imagining indigeneity by localising global influences. Combining symbols and values of indigenous, and particularly Aymara culture, such as the *wiphala*, the *coca* leaf and indigenous languages (Aymara and Quechua), with modern forms of technological communication such as Myspace and Twitter, they demonstrate their awareness of being-in-the-world and what is out there, at the same time as they negotiate their everyday worlds through practices they craft from local resources. They consciously deploy music for purposes of creative expression as well as to mediate historically produced social ruptures, to attack stereotypes and perceived prejudices, and to construct, reconfigure, and communicate meanings associated with their racial, ethnic, and national identities.



**Fig. 1: Aerial view of El Alto**



**Fig. 2 : *Illimani*, the most revered mountain, watching over La Paz and El Alto**





**Fig. 3: La Ceja, El Alto, with Huayna Potosi in the distance**



**Fig. 4: View of La Paz from El Alto**



**Fig. 5: Crossing the pitch after a football match at Rio Seco, El Alto**



**Fig. 6: Jhenny and Kevin Marani, Rio Seco, El Alto**





**Fig. 7: Celebrations for the passing of the New Constitution of the State, 2009**

## **Chapter I**

### **El Alto: Community in Action**

This chapter provides an historical context for the thesis. From the founding of La Paz to the present day political and economic climate of both La Paz and El Alto, it describes the ways in which these two cities are both dependent upon each other and also very much unique in their structural organisation and affiliations. It focuses upon the ways in which El Alto has, over the years, developed a reputation as something of a rebel city, with its inhabitants increasingly using indigeneity as a tool with which to achieve their political ambitions.

### **El Alto and La Paz from “Conquest” to Independence: Patterns of Exclusion and Interdependence**

Although El Alto and La Paz are different cities, the spatial and economic practices of their inhabitants are inextricably linked as well as severely divided. The Spaniards founded the city of La Paz in 1548 at Laja, a site some 30km away from the present city. There is no record of how large the native population was at that time but thirty eight years later when the first census was taken there were a total of 5,820 Indians and 260 Europeans (Guía de La Paz 1948: 12). In 1825, when Bolivia gained independence from the Spaniards, it was founded as a Republic in the city of Sucre, which remains the capital of Bolivia while the government sits in La Paz. The city remained little more than an agricultural centre for the first three hundred and fifty years of its existence. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the land that is now El Alto belonged to about



five or six large haciendas (Sandoval and Sostres 1989). Urban settlements began at La Ceja, at the time a crossroads and the only route out of La Paz.<sup>14</sup> In addition, around the time of the reform, there was severe drought and famine on the altiplano.

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Aymara migrants to La Paz found a city in which the use of public space for celebration or any other demonstration was strictly reserved for Euro-Bolivian men. This continued well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century with legal restrictions preventing native peoples from setting foot in the Plaza Murillo, the city's administrative and cultural centre (Guss 2006). The initial arrivals to La Paz were victims of racism and general discrimination based upon, among other things, colour, language, income and dress. According to Barragán (1998), the fact that La Paz's native population declined from eighty-one percent in 1650 to thirty percent in 1909 does not reflect a racial shift as much as it does a cultural one.<sup>15</sup> The *mestizos* who replaced them were racially indistinguishable, yet culturally they no longer identified as Indians. Instead of subsistence farmers with the collective support of the *ayllu*, they were now wage-earning artisans, often bilingual, wearing clothes and celebrating holidays they formerly disdained. *Polleras* and bowler hats came to be worn only by "Indians." For Barragán, this mesticizing process was a cultural phenomenon driven by the stark economic realities of colonialism; uprooted and detached from the land, indigenous peoples entered a new cultural orbit that transformed their identity.

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<sup>14</sup> People initially settled in order to conduct commercial activities in the service of the railway company, which constructed the first line through the altiplano in 1904. Other important constructions were the airport and flying school, built in 1923, and the offices of Lloyd Aereo Boliviano, the national airline, which opened in 1925 (Sandoval and Sostres 1989). Some of the early inhabitants of El Alto were veterans of the Chaco War (1932-1935) who were offered plots of land near La Ceja for fifty cents. In the 1940s, a number of the hacienda owners there saw the commercial opportunities of urbanising their lands and selling off plots (Lazar 2008).

<sup>15</sup> It was very common for people to redefine themselves in colonial times as identity affected the amount of tribute one paid.

The 1952 National Revolution swept to power the (then) populist MNR, which instituted agrarian reform, nationalised mining and other industries, and established a highly centralised, populist state (Rivas Antezana 2000). An educational reform was carried out at the same time. The agrarian reform, which aimed at the expropriation of the *latifundios* (large estates), the changing of the land tenure system and the liberation of the Indian population,<sup>16</sup> accelerated the process of urbanising hacienda lands and sparked the first big wave of migration to La Paz and El Alto from rural areas (Albó, Greaves, and Sandoval 1981). Thousands of Indians settled in the towns as they refused to return to serfdom in the rural areas and, in many cases, the individual parcels of land given to them were not sufficient to support them and their families. Peasants and miners established federations and unions, and the population at large was politically radicalised during this period (van Lindert 1994).

It is important to stress that although the unions and the Left opened certain spaces for the Aymara to gain some basic human rights, these gains were made at the expense of an indigenous identity. In effect, the creation of workers' unions was a tool used by the nationalist revolution of 1952 to de-Indianise the country, insofar as the Aymara (and other indigenous groups such as the Quechua and Guarani) would have rights as Western workers and not as Indians.<sup>17</sup> Since then the unions and Leftist organisations in general have been a double-edged sword for indigenous peoples. On the one hand, they

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<sup>16</sup> During the colonial period many Indians were forced to work in the mines, while others were being forced under the *mita* system to work in trade, in workshops, or on the haciendas (Widmark 2003: 74). Two types of highland communities came into existence: the hacienda-dominated community and the free-holding community, mostly found in areas with less attractive land. The inhabitants in the former type of community, called *colonos*, lived in a feudal kind of isolation. They were bound for life to their landlord through indebtedness and lack of alternatives.

<sup>17</sup> Zulawski (2007), examining public health and political change in Bolivia between 1900 and 1950, explores how Bolivian doctors engaged broader debates about ethnicity and citizenship in their proposals to improve the health of the country's native population and elevate the professional position of doctors. Focusing upon the work of two prominent doctors, Zulawski writes that both blamed "Indianness," that is to say indigenous cultural values, beliefs and practices, for the country's ill health.

open the door to the political process of the dominant culture; on the other hand, they operate as a straightjacket that does not allow for the full expression of indigenous cosmological vision and thought. The dominant ideology of cultural assimilation of the country's ethnically diverse population was an important objective of the MNR's national development model, and as such it seems to have had a strong influence on all of Bolivia's citizens. After the revolution all reference to the ethnic was seen as a form of racism that should be overcome by a vision exclusively of class, or simply as something primitive condemned to disappear with the rapid process of modernisation (Albó 1996: 7-8).

With the 1952 Revolution the decree which forbade Indians to be seen in the vicinity of the Plaza Murillo of La Paz was overturned. The pavements in the centre of La Paz, until then reserved for the white elite, were now also permitted for Indians, and cinemas, cafes, and public parks could no longer be restricted to the use of the white population (Guss 2006). The government formally banned the use of the pejorative term *indio*, replacing it with the more liberal term *campesino*. Cultural integration was seen at the time as a prerequisite for eliminating poverty and advancing economic development throughout Latin America. Citizens' rights at this time conformed to the "model of the *mestizo* citizen," which Rivera Cusicanqui describes as an individual "consumer and producer of merchandise, a speaker of Spanish and an aspirant to a Western ideal of civilisation" (Rivera Cusicanqui 2004: 21). The arts and letters of *indigenismo* supported this state project in print by extolling the past greatness of the Inca and Tiwanaku civilisations as direct ancestors of the modern Bolivian State (Salmón 1997).

The next wave of migration was linked to the construction boom of Hugo Banzer's dictatorial regime in the 1970s, fuelled by foreign debt and U.S. aid (Dunkerley 1984). Between 1960 and 1976 the population grew from about 30,000 to over 90,000 (Obermaier, Garriga and Donoso Paz 1999). The 1980s saw the third and most recent wave of migration to El Alto from all parts of Bolivia, triggered by the neoliberal restructuring of Paz Estensorro's New Economic Policy, the notorious Decree 21060 of 1985. In the midst of this third wave of migration, Bolivia became democratic in the transition of 1982-1985. The newly elected MNR government implemented a set of radical economic reforms, drastically reducing state spending and instituting a series of austerity measures (Conaghan et al. 1990). The NPE (Nueva Política Económica) put into practice in 1985 by the MNR (Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario) embraced the IMF and WB universal recipe, the Structural Adjustment Programs, which pursued two basic points: macroeconomic measures to stabilise the economy and reduce hyperinflation (basically by reducing public expenditure) and then deregulation and reorientation of the economy to the market (Rivero 2006). Although these policies succeeded in controlling Bolivia's crippling hyper-inflation, they took a disastrous social toll. As a result of these measures to make labour flexible over 20,000 miners were left unemployed and some 35,000 manufacturing jobs were lost. Large numbers of those known as the 'relocalised' (*relocalizados*) migrated to El Alto and the informal sector grew to account for seventy percent of the working population by the end of the decade (Sanabria 2000). By this time emigration from the mining centres and rural Aymara and Quechua areas had driven the population of El Alto to 307,000. Having been a district of the city of La Paz since 1970, in 1985 El Alto was granted a separate municipal administration of its own as capital of the fourth section of the Pedro Murillo province. In 1988, it formally became a city in its own right, changing its name from El

Alto de la Paz to Ciudad de El Alto (Lazar 2008).

A second round of neoliberal reforms was initiated in the mid-1990s, with the election of Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada as president. Goni, as he is more commonly known, instituted his Plan de Todos (Plan for Everyone), a sweeping reform package that affected nearly every facet of the state. At the heart of these reforms were economic privatisation of certain state industries and natural resources under the Law of Capitalisation and administrative decentralisation under the Law of Popular Participation (Kohl 1999; Perreault 2005). Both laws were central to Goni's project of neoliberalising the Bolivian state and have, moreover, facilitated indigenous and popular mobilisation. While the Law of Capitalisation provided a focal point for anti-neoliberal protests, the Law of Popular Participation recognised local grassroots territorial organisations, which became the basis for mobilisation.

The Law of Popular Participation (LPP) of 1994 was a remarkably ambitious attempt at creating an effective system for local development in Bolivia (Gray Molina 2001). The legislation provides resources which should enable the municipality to pay for *obras* (works) and a framework through which inhabitants of municipalities can demand *obras*. It requires a minimum of institutionality from the municipalities, especially in areas of high population. In El Alto, as elsewhere (McNeish 2001; Postero 2006), its proper implementation has been severely retarded, suffering from the inefficiency, corruption, and politicisation of local government (Lazar 2008). Nevertheless, the LPP created three hundred and fourteen new municipalities (by re-designating previously existing administrative units known as provincial sections), gave them authority over development planning, infrastructure construction and budget decisions, and assigned to

them twenty percent of the national budget. Under the LPP, neighbourhood groups and indigenous and *campesino* organisations were granted legal status as representatives of their constituencies through the establishment of Territorial Base Organisations (OTBs). There was much confusion over what OTBs should be but the official line was that they should be organisations already in existence (Bigenho 2000). Representatives of the OTBs form oversight committees, which are responsible for ensuring that municipal budgetary decisions are sound, and are granted veto power over this process (Kohl 2002). In this regard, political decentralisation has undeniably provided indigenous and rural peoples with new opportunities for sociocultural organising and political participation (Albó 2002). This has led to an increased presence of *campesino* and indigenous peoples in formal politics since the late 1990s. The LPP offered new possibilities for inclusion in terms of the constitutional redefinition of the nation as “multiethnic and pluricultural.”

This landmark legislation was a sharp break from the cultural politics of the Bolivian State, at least since the 1952 Revolution, which relegated any indigenous future to assimilation into a desired culturally and ethnically mixed middle class, called the process of *mestizaje* (Rivera Cusicanqui 1993). Multicultural reforms may work as instruments of governmentality to serve a new round of neoliberal nation-building, articulated from above, and failing to address lingering issues of social justice, inequity, and exclusion from below. Multiculturalism is understood in this sense to be a way for governments to use new cultural rights instruments “to divide and domesticate Indian movements” (Hale 2004: 17). Recent developments in Bolivia, however, complicate this picture in a variety of ways, suggesting how both popular and indigenous movements use such new international and state-based rights instruments to transform

the meanings, and very ground, of citizen participation. The terms of legal circumscription of indigenous identity, as the state's condition of political recognition, are being appropriated to new ends by protesters.

## Neighbourhood Organisations

In contrast to La Paz, El Alto relies on its own political and social institutions clearly differentiated from the 'official' *mestizo* and white society that is based in state institutions (Albro 1998a). The city has a tradition of organized workers movements by its neighbourhood and union organisations, for example the legacy of the miners and of Aymara militancy in the La Paz department. People draw upon traditional *juntas vecinales* (neighbourhood organisations) to successfully advocate for greater control of their worlds: resources, government, or educational and health institutions. Most adult *alteños* belong to trade unions.<sup>18</sup> An association consists of all the women and men who sell in the same area, in markets which are held weekly, twice weekly, or daily, depending on the neighbourhood. Associations mediate between individuals and the state and represent the traders in negotiations with the other civic bodies in the zone where they work, principally the *junta vecinal* and other associations of traders. The associations are affiliated with the citywide Federation, which mediates any conflicts between two associations and assists associations when they must deal with the state authorities. The Federation is led by the Executive Committee, the head of which is the executive secretary. The *juntas vecinales* and *juntas escolares* both have citywide federations, as do the street traders. Neighbourhood organizations have existed since

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<sup>18</sup> In the case of the predominately male jobs (as drivers or artisans), the collective organisations are called unions (*sindicatos*), and in the case of the predominately female street traders, they are called associations (*asociaciones*) (Lazar 2008).

1957, although the Federation of Neighbourhood Councils (Fejuve) was created more recently, in 1979. In the 1970s labour federations of shopkeepers and artisans were created who, unlike factory workers, had a labour identity with strong popular territorial support. Organizations of professionals, artisans and retailers, bakers and butchers joined in 1988 to create the El Alto Regional Labour Central (COR). From the beginning COR coordinated its activity with that of Fejuve, and the two became the most important organizations in the city (Lazar 2008).

The neighbourhood councils form the backbone of social movements in El Alto and shed light on their power. Several authors have recognised the significance of collective organisation in El Alto (Sandoval and Sostres 1989; Sostres 1995; Anze 1995; Lazar 2008). In the communities' strivings to be self-sufficient there are always many communal projects around common services and infrastructure such as roads, bridges, irrigation, schools, health and social centres. The members are expected to contribute by participating in communal workdays, paying shares for a specific purpose, and taking on certain responsibilities, which almost always implies monetary contributions as well. These responsibilities will rotate among members, which means that everybody is equal over time. Shared interests, shared institutions, and shared culture represent different kinds of intra-group ties and constitute alternative potential bases of group cohesion and action.

The community or *barrio* orientation and the resulting settlement pattern is an important dimension of the Aymara concept of space, according to Miracle and Yapita (1981), who point out that, for an Aymara person, individual identity is rooted in community. Justo Oxa, an elementary school teacher who self-identifies as indigenous writes: "The



community, the *ayllu*, is not only a territory where a group of people live; it is more than that. It is a dynamic space where the whole community of beings that exist in the world lives; this includes humans, plants, animals, the mountains, rivers, the rain, etc. All are related like a family. It is important to remember that this place [the community] is not where we are from, *it is who we are*” (Oxa 2004: 249). The consequence of this community identification, when the hacienda system fell, was that the Aymara were free to migrate while still maintaining community ties. This situation has meant that community identity and forms have been utilised in facilitating large-scale migrations. If community members wish or need to emigrate, they usually go to one of the established bases, in either the city or the lowlands (Miracle and Yapita 1981: 47). Communities have been created within El Alto based upon place of residence or birth, occupation, or kinship networks. In this respect it is not unlike other Andean cities where rural-urban migrants have settled (Lobo 1981; Long 1984; Turino 1993; Paerregaard 1997) and the importance of rural connections in the process of adjusting to urban life while still maintaining the integrity of family and personal life has been touched upon by several anthropologists (Buechler 1968; Mangin 1970).

The relationship between El Alto and its rural hinterland is crucial to understanding it as a city.<sup>19</sup> Those who have migrated to El Alto from rural areas usually have experience of some form of community organisation there, as members of *ayllus* or peasant unions or as ex-hacienda workers. Those who migrated from the mines have an illustrious tradition of trade unionism (Lora 1977; Gill 2000). Although unions are an organisational form that has been connected to the construction of the nation-state and

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<sup>19</sup> Bolivian scholars have investigated the links between rural-urban migrants and their places of origin to great effect, beginning in the early 1980s, when El Alto was still part of La Paz; an example is the seminal four-volume work, *Chukiyawu: La Cara Aymara de La Paz*, by Albó, Greaves, and Sandoval (1981, 1982, 1983, 1987). See also Buechler and Buechler (1996).

used as a tool of internal colonialism, Rivera Cusicanqui (1993) considers that in the case of El Alto they articulated the organisational and political memory of the *ayllu*. In Bolivia, *ayllus* are most common in Northern Potosí, but are also found in southern Potosí, Cochabamba, Oruro and La Paz (Allen 1988; Healy 2001; Mendoza and Patzi 1997; Rivera Cusicanqui 2003; Yampara Huarachi 2001).

There has been no census to determine how many *alteño* residents maintain a place in the countryside but it is evident that, on the level of individual families, the bonds between city and countryside are strong. The concept of 'resident' has emerged as a new and important social category in the countryside; this is the name locals have developed for those who live in the city. Many of these city dwellers organise associations based on place of origin and keep strong ties with their home communities (Paerregaard 1997; Widmark 2003). Family celebrations help seal these ties through rituals that cement exchanges, rights and mutual obligations. These residents know that if they fulfill their communal obligations, including holding communal offices and sponsoring patronal fiestas – they will maintain their rights to the land. With the 1994 Popular Participation Law, rural municipalities have obtained many more resources, and some El Alto residents also run for mayors and councilmen in their home communities. Quite a few rural municipalities even have a second informal seat in the city - which could be the urban home of the mayor – to attend to the needs of *paisanos*, residents from the community and to facilitate dealings with departmental/national administration (Albó 2011).

Most previous interpretations of the *ayllu* are arbitrary and intentional reductions of the meaning to fit within notions of lineage and family. The *ayllu* has been described as the

indigenous social cell, formed by the consanguine family as a forebear to the community (Diez de Medina 1957: 95); as an 'enlarged or extended family, a sub-tribe' (Mason 1957: 10). Zuidema (1977: 257) suggests that the word *ayllu* can be applied to "any social or political group with a boundary separating it from the outside." Isbell provides an interpretation of the present-day use of the term, in which she defines *ayllu* as a unit within which certain bonds of kinship are recognised (Isbell 1978). The *ayllu* was a self-supporting unit with a form of collective ownership of agricultural and grazing land. That is, the grazing land was used in common, while the farm land was rotated and redistributed yearly among the *ayllu* members. This was carried out by the village headman, the *jilaqata*, according to the needs of each extended family. The only permanently and privately owned land was that on which the families had their houses, often in the form of a wall-enclosed compound for each extended family.

Despite the fact that, even during the nation-state phase (i.e. after independence from Spain) when coloniality was redefined as internal colonialism (Rivera Cusicanqui 1993), the *ayllu* was not incorporated into colonial hegemony, *ayllu* politics were modified by the colonial regime, forming the basis for censuses and for *mita* drafts.<sup>20</sup> The *ayllu* has remained in place in remote areas of southern Peru and Bolivia (Allen 1988), but it is as much a product of interaction with colonial and post-colonial forms of domination as it is an historical artefact of sociocultural organisation (Weismantel 2006). Marking a conceptual advance from early chroniclers,<sup>21</sup> Yampara Huarachi

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20 The viceroy established the *mita* (from the Quechua word *mit'a*), a labour draft which, in its 1578 version, required a total of 14,296 men to go and work in the mines of Potosí each year (Cole 1985: 17). Also see Rasnake 1988.

21 Garcilaso de Vega [1609] (1991) and Cieza de Leon [1553] (1947) used the words lineage, kin, family, partiality, and band to refer to the *ayllu*. Authors closer to our times continued this tradition. For example, Saavedra stated that 'the *ayllu* connotes aristocratic kinship relations, it is close to the classic meaning of gens' [1903: 29] (1987). According to the same author, this *ayllu*-clan had limited economic and social functions; it was non-political by definition and little more than an organisational relic. For Platt (1982), the *ayllu* is little more than a space for tribute, solidarity, work and reciprocity.

(2001) conceives the *ayllu* as the territory of a community of kin and as a socio-economic model that also shapes the domain of politics. The *ayllu* remains fundamental to understanding the logic that inspires the Andean Indigenous movements and their political mobilisation.

### **The Politicisation of the *Ayllu***

In recent years, the *ayllu* has taken on explicitly political meaning, as it has served as a material and symbolic basis for ethnic resurgence among Quechua and Aymara peoples in northern Potosí, Cochabamba and the altiplano of La Paz. The hermeneutical potential contained in the *ayllu* is behind the political actions of the Indigenous movements because it nourishes the political memory and the critical consciousness of the 'oppressed but not defeated' (Rivera Cusicanqui 2003). Led by organisations such as the National Confederation of Ayllus and Markas of Qollosuyu (CONAMAQ) and the Andean Oral History Workshop (THOA), the *ayllu* movement has adopted an explicitly indigenist ideological stance to legitimate claims to territorially-based ethnic autonomy (Lucero 2006; Rivera Cusicanqui 2003, 2004; Weismantel 2006).<sup>22</sup>

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22 The importance of the concept of the *ayllu* for understanding the multiple meanings of Andean peoples' social movements must be stressed, for their struggles are oriented not only to recover territorial spaces and political rights but also to keep and legitimise Andean knowledge and personhood. Guaman Poma de Ayala, who wrote *El Primer Nueva Corónica y Buen Gobierno* [1615] (1988), is one of the first Indigenous chroniclers who wrote in the face of the increasingly destructive colonial system and with the stated intention of advising the Spanish king on how to govern the Andean region with justice, as the Inca rulers had done before (See <http://www.kb.dk/elib/mss/poma/>). Debates on this system and subsequent adaptations of the colonial administration led to the adaptation of policies – such as the *encomienda*, *corregimiento*, and *tributo* – through which colonial institutions were implanted forcefully (Lockhart 1994; Wachtel 1976). These colonial mechanisms fostered the appropriation and concentration of lands in the hands of the colonisers and their transformation, along with other substantive elements of the Andean world, into exploitable and disposable resources.

Few political movements have effectively capitalised on the links between *alteños* and their *pueblos*. The most important Aymara movement in Bolivia, Katarismo (named after Tupac Katari), has targeted its political efforts at rural areas since its inception in the late 1960s, rather than appealing to urban Aymaras in El Alto or La Paz. Despite the fact that many of its leaders were educated urban Aymaras, its rhetoric was directed towards indigenous people as noble peasants with an alternative social, political, and economic logic based upon either the *ayllu* or the peasant union (Untoja 2000).<sup>23</sup> There is a sense in which the rural-urban migrants are seen as already assimilated into Hispanic society, by virtue simply of having moved to the city. Katarismo has found it difficult to deal with the ordinary people who are both rural and urban and who move between the two spheres with relative ease (Lazar 2008: 231). Katarismo was an important precursor to the current indigenous social and political movements in Bolivia. It reflected a series of political developments that had their origins in the 1960s but that came to fruition during the regime of Hugo Banzer Suárez (1971-78).

The more recent strategies of political mobilisation in Bolivia entered a new phase in the 1970s when, according to Hurtado and Albó, the proximity of the “white” society, the non-fulfillment of the national revolution, and the realisation that the indigenous peasants continued to be treated as second-class citizens, led to the emergence of a new ethnic consciousness among the Aymaras (Hurtado 1986; Albó 1996). A new political and social movement, using references to a sense of belonging politically to an ethnic group, developed in the urban areas among suburban migrants working in the informal sector. This movement was spurred by the increasing number of urban dwellers of

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<sup>23</sup> Although the movement took its name from the late-18<sup>th</sup> century indigenous leader Julián Apasa, whose *nome de guerre* was Tupaj Katari, the movement itself emerged in La Paz among university students with origins in traditionally radicalised areas of the Aymara countryside (Albó 1987: 391).

Aymara origin and the feeling that new ethnic and social identities and ways of life in the city did not fit with conventional ethnic and social categorisation. Carlos Palenque was significant as a leading figure in the social and political movement of CONDEPA (Conciencia de Patria) that attracted mestizos, *cholos* and urban Aymaras. CONDEPA was founded in September 1988 at Tiwanaku, a sacred site for Aymara people. One of the most important cornerstones of this movement was the radio, and subsequently the television program called *Tribuna Libre del Pueblo* (*The Free Tribunal of the People*). A large part of the program was dedicated to visits from ordinary people who came to expose a problem in hopes of support or help from the channel or the audience. CONDEPA managed to gain many votes in the elections of 1989. According to Strobele - Gregor et al. (1994), the party's triumph was not due to the charismatic leader Carlos Palenque or to the party's program, which was ill-defined, but because the leader was perceived as a defender of the most vulnerable social groups of the cities of La Paz and El Alto. In his communications and actions, Palenque used these groups' own cultural expressions as well as traditional representations of reciprocity, mutual aid, and communitarian work, thus re-valuing the cultural identity of the migrants. Palenque organised actions of help in a pragmatic way, and his proposal for getting urban Aymara peoples out of misery was based on a reinforcement of the organisational forms that had emerged in the urban Aymara subculture itself. Over several years he gave the Aymara migrants the possibility of converting their life conditions into a public issue through radio and television transmissions (Stephenson 2002).

Following the traditions of intellectuals such as Nina Quispe and Fausto Reinaga,<sup>24</sup> the Andean Oral History Workshop (THOA), an intellectual and cultural organisation,

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<sup>24</sup> Fausto Reinaga was a "prolific and marginalised writer and self-publisher of Indianist themes, and the founder of a more symbolic than real Indian Party" (Albó 1987: 391). See also Ticona Alejo 2010.

emerged in the 1980s. The project implied a return to indigenous knowledge through the words of the elders and, by rescuing the collective memory of the *ayllus*, it produced critical thinkers who have since enacted a decolonising program from within the academy. THOA focused its work upon re-writing history from an indigenous perspective, enabling Aymara peoples in particular to reclaim their past. Since 1983, the work of this pioneering Aymara NGO has contributed in key ways to the formation of an indigenous counter-public sphere in Bolivia (Fraser 1990). For over two decades it has conducted an ongoing critique of Western epistemologies through writings and activism. As its first critical endeavour, THOA fostered the elaboration and expression of Andean cultural identities by collecting and circulating historical, political, and testimonial documents disseminated mainly in bilingual (Aymara and Spanish) publications, videos, and radio programs or *radionovelas*. The deployment of bilingual documents has generated an oppositional forum where native peoples can explore their own identities and voices, experience of political disenfranchisement, and cultural dislocation (Felski 1989: 167). At the same time, this cultural production presumes native linguistic agency by rewriting ‘Bolivian history.’ The success of the radio program and publication rests on more than the participatory act of remembering and retelling. THOA’s work caused specific Aymara leaders and ‘sites of experience’ to become visible to a wide Aymara interpretative community (Merewether 1996: 108). Their works have fed and strengthened the Indigenous and peasant movements that demand a country that respects political and social diversity (Blaser et al. 2010: 40).

The year 1990 is a watershed moment in the recent history of indigenous mobilisation and resistance. The March for Dignity and Territory was undertaken in response to the state's repeated refusal to recognise indigenous demands, particularly its refusal to grant

lands in the centre of the Chimanés Forest, where logging was most profitable. Several hundred indigenous people, along with various supporters, walked from Beni, the capital of Trinidad, to La Paz. March leaders successfully framed the debate not just in terms of land and resources but also in terms of indigenous rights and recognition. This resonated with indigenous highlanders and created broad support in civil society. By the time they arrived in La Paz, *el movimiento* was born and, in the process, Bolivian indigenusness had been recast within a wider universe, symbolised by the *wiphalas* (the checkered rainbow flag of indigenous nations) that the marchers carried along the route. By 1992, the 500 Year Celebration had given way to 500 Years of Resistance and, a year later, in 1993, the first self-identified indigenous Bolivian was elected to high office: Victor Hugo Cárdenas Conde, who entered office as Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada's vice president.

The elevation of Cárdenas was extraordinary for several reasons, not the least of which was the fact that he was the Aymara leader of the Tupaj Katari Revolutionary Movement for Liberation (MRTKL), which was the only remaining katarista political party by the early 1990s. Those who questioned Cardenas's participation in the presidential platform of the MNR pointed to the evident contradiction of participating in an election as a candidate of the most conspicuous political force of the Bolivian right – the organic representative of the neo-liberal project, whose main victims, the poorest sectors of Bolivian society, were precisely the Indians whom Katarism sought to represent. For those who supported Cardenas' decision there was enormous symbolic weight attached to the fact that an Indian might occupy the vice-presidency of the Republic, and also that the presence of Cardenas in this position would open up a space for gaining important positions in the struggle to meet indigenous demands. Furthermore, several



laws were promulgated granting significant rights to indigenous sectors. Some redistribution of resources was also achieved, through a reform according to which a certain quantity of resources was assigned to municipal authorities, relating to the size of its population (Manrique 2000: 238).

Tapia argues that, during the 1980s and 90s, the defeat of the popular, trade unionist and leftist forces meant that the elite-based political party system took over institutionalised politics at the time, expelling the workers to the '*no lugares*' or '*non-places*' of politics. With the elections of 2002, the successes of the MAS (Movement towards Socialism) and the MIP (Indigenous Pachakuti Movement) saw the return of the workers and the re-entry of the class struggle into parliament. The proliferation of the non-places during the 1980s and 1990s meant 'the renovation of the capacity for political life in the heart of the popular classes, a capacity for organisation and collective action' (Tapia 2002: 72). The historical social change going on in Bolivia has gained strength in the last decade, a period that has been characterised by popular protest movements reflecting the incapacity of institutionalised channels to satisfy the demands and needs of the population; moreover they are an indication of the social and economic failure of the neo-liberal model (Rivero 2006). Between 1999 and 2003, multiple demonstrations were organised by different collective bodies to protest reductions in state expenditures on health, education, and pensions, income tax increases to fund the servicing of external debt, the export of natural gas, and more. In such mobilisations, *alteños* expressed their increasing levels of anger at the effects of the neoliberal policies of successive governments (Arbona 2007).

## **Recent Mobilisations: El Alto as Rebel City**

El Alto has played an important role in Bolivia's social struggles and civic mobilisations; political radicalism and indigeneity have been vital to the development of a specific alteño identity. The geographic location of the city allows it a strangle-hold over La Paz. In 1781, Aymara militias led by Tupac Katari and Bartolina Sisa established their headquarters in the area, which was at the time largely uninhabited pampa, placing the city of La Paz under siege for almost a month. This was part of the pan-Andean revolts of Tupaq Amaru, who led a rebellion in the zone stretching from Cuzco to the altiplano and around Lake Titicaca and became a symbol of social justice in Peru (Stavig and Schmidt 2008). In 1899, the Aymara people of El Alto established a human blockade during the Federal War to prevent constitutional troops from entering. El Alto was the political stage for the definitive triumph of the National Revolution in 1952, which freed indigenous peoples from their second-class citizenship, when universal suffrage was introduced as one of four major social and economic reforms. The Revolution of 1952, which gave rise to the agrarian reform was also the first time that many of the eleven thousand inhabitants of El Alto participated in mass mobilisations as organised communities (Sandoval and Sostres 1989).

The first Sánchez de Lozada (1993-97) government represented the peak of neoliberal optimism in Bolivia, in which the privatisation of natural resources was combined with progressive social and legal reforms that emphasised bilingual education, the decentralisation of decision-making authority over resource allocation, and the implementation at the national legal level of different international human rights norms,

especially those involving the rights of “indigenous and tribal peoples.” Despite the relative calm throughout Bolivia during the mid-90s, and the rise of a discourse of multiculturalism – one, surprisingly enough, accepted by the La Paz elite, less so by the neo-*hacendado* landowners in Santa Cruz – signs of trouble began to appear after one of the most controversial components of Goni’s reform agenda was passed in 1996: the Ley de Tierras (Land Law), which was meant to replace much of the existing agrarian reform legislation. Almost immediately, the new legislation and the institute that was charged with implementing it – the Instituto Nacional de la Reforma Agraria (INRA) – became the targets of intense criticism within Bolivia from both indigenous groups and their collaborators within the intelligentsia (Solón 1997; Antezana 1999).

This opposition to Bolivia’s commitment to neoliberalism intensified during the late 1990s, as the centre-right government of Hugo Banzer Suárez (now president) most provocatively went ahead with a plan to sell the concession to provide water to the Cochabamba Valley to Aguas de Tunari, a subsidiary of the U.S. - based multi-national Bechtel Corporation. Once the water services had been privatised, prices rose dramatically within a very short period and social unrest soon followed, which culminated in the Water War of late 1999 and early 2000. As a result of this massive uprising, in which one youth was killed and dozens injured by soldiers, the Banzer government was forced to cancel its contract with Bechtel in April 2000.<sup>25</sup>

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25 The Water War in Cochabamba showed that broad coalitions could be mobilised successfully against multinational companies in the protection of natural resources. The leaders of the movement were quick to recognise the importance of adopting the language of indigeneity not only in the hope of engaging Quechua-speakers in the valley of Cochabamba (Laurie, Andolina and Radcliffe 2002) but also to attract the interest of an international press which was accustomed to reporting indigenous rights issues and environmental concerns as one and the same (Canessa 2006: 249). In the early months of 2000, the combined efforts of ‘peasant’ irrigators, urban middle class professionals, labour unions, environmentalists, students, coca growers, and the recently in-migrating urban poor living in marginal barrios, won Bolivia’s so-called Water War by forcing the government to renege on its questionable behind-closed-doors deal made with the consortium Aguas de Tunari (with a controlling interest by Bechtel) to purchase the city of Cochabamba’s water works.

Following the Water War of 2000 in Cochabamba, opposing the privatisation of water, a plethora of social demands and protests started to take place, coming especially from the peasants of the altiplano. None were to have such an impact as 'Black February' and 'Black October.' The announcement, on February 11<sup>th</sup> 2003, of a wage tax increment in order to reduce the public deficit by President Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada, brought with it a violent confrontation between the police force, the army, and a dissatisfied population. This general dissatisfaction led to a series of violent demonstrations that resulted in the destruction and looting of ministry buildings and large companies in La Paz. These were targets as they represented government corruption and the neo-liberal economic model. A few months later, in October, the citizens of El Alto were the key protagonists of the Gas War. This lasted nine days, leaving seventy-six people dead and four hundred injured as people fought to recover their natural resources again (Mamani Ramírez 2005).

Although this started as a movement of sectorial claim, it ended as a national demand that not only resulted in a huge increment of government revenues from gas sales but also in the expulsion of President Sánchez de Lozada. In the ousting of the US-backed Bolivian President Lozada, issues of race were at the very centre of a historical moment that could not be shaped any longer by the previous nature of race relations established in Bolivian society. An indigenous social movement inspired by the notion of indigeneity, with strong evident participation of women, re-established a different composition. The 2003 Gas War involved coalitions of indigenous peoples and *campesinos*, urban workers and intellectuals, who together rejected the neoliberal model and called for more exclusive, democratic rule. The protestors involved were articulating concerns about globalisation, constitutional reform, state corruption and the

defence of coca-growers through the language of class and indigeneity. October 2003 was a significant turning point in the development of the distinctive identity of the city of El Alto; a moment of awakening in which the indigenous movement finally began to capitalise on the links between *alteños* and their birth villages in the countryside.<sup>26</sup> The Gas War was not only a social movement with economic demands. It was the response to more than five hundred years of colonialism, repression, exclusion and poverty and these difficulties had been deepened with the long years of high debts, hyperinflation and dictatorships in the 1970s and 1980s, and with the structural adjustments in the late 1980s and 1990s. As Arce and Rice (2009: 92) have argued, the October 2003 uprising was an open expression of the failure of the state's democratic institutions to adequately represent the people's interests and of the neoliberal economic model to resolve the nation's pressing needs.

The toppling of the Sánchez de Lozada administration forever changed the city of El Alto. Before 2003, its political importance was often overlooked; many residents described it as an 'invisible city.' Since October 2003, however, it has become a city difficult to ignore, with the events of that year coming to “represent an important affirmation of 'people power' in Bolivian politics” (Crabtree 2005: 1). It was a catalytic moment that shifted the balance of power between social movements and the state, giving a powerful voice to a marginal city (Dangl 2007).

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<sup>26</sup> The Confederación Sindical Unica de Trabajadores Campesinos de Bolivia (CSUTBC; Sole Trade Union Confederation of Peasant Workers in Bolivia) began their hunger strike at the beginning of September in the buildings of Radio San Gabriel on Avenida Bolivia in El Alto. Local residents held bonfire-lit vigils outside the buildings in order to protect the peasants from rumoured army interventions. Accordingly, the peasants' protest was brought firmly into the middle of the city (Lazar 2008).

A closer look shows that characterising the October uprising, the Gas War, as simply an “Indian” uprising misses the complexity of the situation. Although many of the protesters identified themselves as Indians, this was not a protest on behalf of Indian rights and recognition similar to those protests that made history in the 1990s. Rather, this was a strikingly new social formation by which the protestors made objections on behalf of “the Bolivian people” (Postero 2006: 4). Its protagonists blended indigenous activism with a renewed populist notion of the nation, reflecting the fact that the majority of Bolivians are both indigenous and poor. Since the 1952 revolution, indigenous people and the poor have organised their demands against the state primarily on the basis of class. Even when there was a strong cultural or ethnic component to these demands, such as the Aymara-led Katarista movement, they tended to be articulated through class-based corporate organisations, for example workers and peasant unions. Over the past several decades, however, indigenous social movements have characterised their demands more on the basis of ethnic difference and recognition (Postero 2006: 5). This process has been shaped, in part, by international NGO funding and a global discourse that made “indigenouness” and indigenous rights central tropes of social movement organising in the 1990s.

After the Gas War Goni was succeeded by his vice president Carlos Mesa who, despite initial popularity and political calm, was forced to step down in June 2005 amidst widespread protests in El Alto, La Paz and Cochabamba which paralysed much of the country’s Andean west. These protests involved diverse groups mobilised around causes including the privatisation of water services in El Alto and La Paz, teachers’ pension reform, calls for the nationalisation of the country’s natural gas, demands for constitutional reform, and defence of coca production. The mobilisations during

October 2003 and early 2005, in which COR and Fejuve together played a determining role, built upon a long tradition of civic organisation, as *alteños* drew on “repertoires of collective action” (Tilly 1978, 1993; Lazar 2008) familiar to them from previous struggles with the state. Mesa’s departure led to the selection of judge Eduardo Rodríguez to head a caretaker government, the central task of which was to provide for new elections in December of that year. The traditional political parties – the MNR, the Revolutionary Left Movement (MIR), Nationalist Democratic Action (ADN) and the New Republican Force (NRF) – which between them had controlled most political offices in the country over the past several years, had by this time lost credibility with the majority of voters. In their place, newly powerful groups of the “popular classes” have emerged: the *coca* growers (*cocaleros*) of the Chapare region, led by Evo Morales, who became an activist with the coca-growers union as a young man; the peasants of the altiplano; and the residents of El Alto, as both workers and *vecinos*.<sup>27</sup>

### **The Return of the Indian: Evo Morales and the Movement Towards Socialism (MAS)**

The MAS (Movimiento al Socialismo) emerged out of the union of *coca* leaf producers, which was formed by migrant indigenous peasants who settled in the tropics of Cochabamba after the 1952 revolution and miners displaced after structural adjustment

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<sup>27</sup> The array of what in Bolivia is referred to simply as the social movements (*movimientos sociales*) includes indigenist organisations such as THOA and CONAMAQ, indigenous and/or sindicalista political parties such as MAS and the Altiplano-based Pachakuti Indigenous Movement (MIP), the radical Confederation of Peasant Labour Unions of Bolivia (CSUTCB), the coca-growers union, the influential Cochabamba irrigators’ federation (FEDECOR) and other, *mestizo*-led groups like the sindicalist Bolivian Workers Central (COB) and the Coordinator for the Defence of Water and Life (Coordinadora de Defensa del Agua y la Vida), which led the 2000 Cochabamba Water War. Together, these social movements form occasional ‘plural popular’ coalitions that unite rural with urban, Aymara and Quechua with *mestizo*, worker with *campesino* (Albro 2006a). All of these new groups share a set of relations of production that should mean they are less vulnerable to state predation than were the miners in previous decades, an argument made by Sanabria for the *cocaleros* (Sanabria 2000).

in the early 1980s. These indigenous peasants were looking for better opportunities because life in their villages of origin had become impossible due to the overexploitation of land; they had experienced everyday hunger, misery, state discrimination and violence. From its electoral base in the tropical *coca*-growing region of the Chapare, the MAS party first appeared as a regional political force in municipal elections in the late 1990s. Since the 1980s, US-led anti-drug campaigns have pushed for the eradication of *coca* (the key ingredient in cocaine), an ongoing effort that has led to several violent confrontations and numerous deaths and injuries. In response, *coca* growers, the vast majority of whom are of Quechua or Aymara-speaking origin, have organised themselves into one of the most disciplined unions in the country.<sup>28</sup>

The MAS's electoral base consists largely of *campesino* and indigenous peoples and its popularity has grown on the (mostly Aymara) altiplano and further south as well as among disaffected *mestizo* voters, the urban poor, intellectuals and the Bolivian Left more broadly, mostly in the Andean west but also in the lowland east. These voters were key to the victory of Morales in the 2005 election in which he received fifty four per cent of the popular vote in the first round of elections – the largest vote total in Bolivian history and twice as many votes as his closest rival, Jorge 'Tuto' Quiroga. The son of Aymara *campesinos*, Morales grew up in the mining camps of Oruro and is the country's first indigenous president. He retains his position as head of the *cocaleros* while simultaneously serving as President of the Republic (Albro 2006c).

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<sup>28</sup> Given its longstanding importance to Andean cultures, together with its targeting for eradication by the US and Bolivian drug enforcement agencies, *coca* provides a potent symbol of both cultural heritage and anti-imperialist politics (Farthing and Ledebur 2004).



The election of Evo Morales, made possible by the support of the coalition of plural/popular social movements, signalled a radical transformation of the relations between the Bolivian state and the indigenous majority, for whom it represented the end to their exclusion from power since colonisation by the Spanish five hundred years ago. Morales set into motion a nationalist project with two main agendas: the nationalisation of oil and gas and a Constitutional Convention. With the first measure, Morales proposed to do away with the “plunder of natural resources,” in the words of his party, MAS; the second sought to do away with “internal colonialism.” These developments have transformed Bolivia into a beacon for those who are searching for alternative models to capitalistic modernity and to the present economic crisis; Evo Morales has come to be recognised as an icon for critics of globalisation.

As recent experience in Bolivia has shown, one must not confuse indigenous political appointments with fully democratic representation for indigenous peoples, or assume that the presence of individuals of indigenous heritage in government will necessarily result in improvements in political rights or the material conditions of life for the indigenous masses. Aymara intellectual and Katarista leader Victor Hugo Cardenas served as vice president during the first term of Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada (1993-1997). This appointment did not lead directly to substantial improvements in the conditions of life for indigenous peoples. Also, movements based on ethnic ideas are not a new phenomenon in Bolivia. The Bolivian government moved from segregationist politics during the colony to an assimilationist stance during the republic, and finally to the recognition of a multicultural state in the nineties. Today, protest leaders emphasise the need to “reclaim” (Spanish: *reivindicar*) democracy, as a collective political birthright actively “remembered” and rhetorically relocated as an alternative tradition of

political engagement that preceded the Spanish Conquest. “Democracy” from the point of view of Bolivia's new social movements, has become a cultural heritage of the past and a critical dimension of popular enfranchisement in the future. Rivera Cusicanqui describes an alternative democracy as one that speaks Quechua or Aymara, is communitarian and participatory (*asambleista*). This kind of democracy is activated by current public protests as a “set of repertoires for common action that reveal a functioning collective memory as indigenous people” (Rivera Cusicanqui 2004: 21).

There is a new sense of pride in being identified as indigenous Bolivian and a recognition that this identity can be used as a powerful instrument for change. As Albro says, ‘The indigenous majority.....has entered the centre of the city and now occupies the presidential palace’ (Albro 2006a). Out of a total of sixteen, fourteen of Evo’s cabinet appointments went to people of indigenous heritage. He also requires civil servants to speak at least one of the three most common indigenous languages (Aymara, Quechua or Guarani), and eliminated the Ministry of Indigenous Affairs, whose focus on the ‘indigenous problem’ has long been rejected as racist by indigenous activists and intellectuals. Since the MAS first emerged as a political party in the mid-1990s it has gone from being the political expression of a narrow interest group, the *cocaleros* of the Chapare, to being the hegemonic force in Bolivian politics. Its electoral advance has been both cause and consequence of the development of an organised grassroots presence throughout the country. The MAS has been able to appeal to a wide range of interests on the basis of a discourse and a government agenda that has overcome regional particularism and can appeal to the majority of the population, whether indigenous or not. This has been evidenced by the increase in its vote in departments like Tarija, Santa Cruz, Beni and Pando.

Young alteños growing up in this context of particularly rapid social and political change are experiencing new freedom and possibilities unknown to previous generations, whilst simultaneously striving to deal with numerous challenges associated with the urban environment. The following chapter focuses upon one particular group of young alteños – those involved in the occupation of shoe-shining, investigating the ways in which they manage to create belonging, resist various forms of discrimination, in particular racism, and ultimately find in their work a source of empowerment.

## **Chapter II**

### **“Geographies of Resistance” and Global Imaginations: Young Alteño Shoe - Shiners**

Having provided an historical context for the thesis in chapter one, this chapter addresses the ways in which young alteños are confronting their marginalised status by engaging in the occupation of shoe-shining. For first generation migrants, the urban environment represented new opportunities for work and education for their children yet reality has, more often than not, failed to live up to expectations and migrants and their descendents have been confronted by a host of challenges and difficulties unique to the city. They did not intend their children to work on the streets yet, to date, there has been little alternative since no government has offered a satisfactory solution to the problems of unemployment and all that it implies. As El Alto expands its inhabitants, particularly the younger generation today, are exposed to increased criminality, violence, alcohol and drug addiction, prostitution and gambling. For these young people, immediate economic gain is their priority and this is what shoe-shining provides, along with independence and a degree of self-respect. As the population of El Alto increases so does the number of young people working as shoe-shiners. They choose this work because it is easy to learn, little equipment is necessary to set up in business and there are almost always customers in the street. Rather than considering this occupation to be 'labour' in the negative and oppressive sense, shoe-shining is viewed as an opportunity. As described in the previous chapter, until not long ago parts of La Paz were designated off limits to indigenous people. Today, the majority of young shoe-shiners, who self-identify as indigenous (particularly Aymara) travel down from El Alto to La Paz to work each day.

Until recently, in Bolivia, shoe-shiners have been marginalised by the government at all levels - municipal, departmental and national. No government has effected an integral project for the shoe-shiners and they have been refused an audience to discuss issues of healthcare, education and housing. Today, however, the rights of young shoe-shiners are gradually improving as they fall into the categories most supported by Morales and MAS: poor and indigenous. They are becoming increasingly confident to voice their social and political ambitions and are using a variety of formal and informal strategies to improve their working conditions. Morales and his government have suggested that support will be forthcoming if the shoe-shiners can organise themselves as other workers, such as the miners, have done. He is offering improvements in work standards and legislation, social protection, worker benefits, secure property rights, and stronger representation of shoe-shiners in policy processes. Previously lone workers are increasingly choosing to join an association, enticed by the possibility of legal recognition, improved working conditions and social networks.

Place and space are bound up with the power relations between different social groups within the city; young *alteño* shoe-shiners experience La Paz as comprising different types of space that may include or exclude them. Firstly, this chapter investigates the challenges, including various forms of discrimination, which young shoe-shiners encounter whilst working on the streets, such as racism, state violence and exclusion from particular spaces in the city. It then focuses upon the creative ways in which young shoe-shiners respond to the challenges of the street, negotiating boundaries and appropriating public spaces through particular forms of resistance in order to inhabit the city. In an attempt to find solidarity shoe-shiners have created their own distinctive

social worlds through particular “geographies of resistance” (Beazley 2000)<sup>29</sup> which enable them to navigate the city of La Paz and appropriate certain spaces as their own; spaces where they feel a sense of belonging and community. Young *alteño* shoe-shiners are using local and foreign organisations to their advantage, maintaining autonomy and gaining benefits where they can. They are also using a variety of informal and creative solutions to deal with the challenges they encounter on the street. This chapter addresses the ways in which, through these strategies, young *alteño* shoe-shiners are orienting themselves towards the future, with hope being a motivational agent in their lives. The research for this chapter - and indeed much of this thesis – was conducted with young shoe-shiners at Fundación Nuevo Dia (FND), a local NGO run by and for shoe-shiners in La Paz.<sup>30</sup> Approximately forty percent of shoe-shiners in La Paz of the fourteen associations are affiliated with FND.

## **Challenges of the Street**

It is estimated that there are approximately three thousand five hundred shoe-shiners (men, women and children) working in La Paz and El Alto. Although shoe-shiners work in all the major cities of Bolivia, they are particularly visible in La Paz and El Alto due to their large numbers and also to the fact that the majority wear balaclavas, which conceals individual identity but makes them more conspicuous as a group. It is impossible, particularly for a tourist or *gringo*, to walk down the main street of La Paz, El Prado, without noticing the shoe-shiners working on street corners and sitting

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29 Beazley (2000) has identified “geographies of resistance” in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, where, despite their cultural and state sanctioned subordination, homeless children's appropriation of public spaces for their own survival contributes to the formation of what Beazley calls a “cultural space.”

30 Unlike other such organisations, many of which stipulate that workers must leave or discontinue contact at the age of eighteen, FND supports both young and adult shoe-shiners.

outside shops waiting for custom. Over the course of fieldwork I gradually became familiar with the daily routine of many young *alteño* shoe-shiners. They leave El Alto early in the morning, at about 4.30am, and catch *micros* (minibuses) to La Paz, where they position themselves in the territory of the organisation to which they belong, often meeting up with other workers and friends in that territory. Until the sun comes up it is bitterly cold and they huddle together as they wait for customers, sitting on their shoe-shine boxes and talking, maybe having coffee bought from a street stall or, more often, a flask which they have brought from home. They are dressed in the uniform of their association; a waistcoat with the name of the association together with the standard heavy boots or trainers, overalls and balaclava.

Since they first arrived in El Alto, migrants have experienced ambivalence, as if living between two worlds, the rural of their home village and the urban of the city of La Paz. This peculiar position has been classified as *mundo cholo*. *Cholo* means an Indian who has come to live in the city and is somewhere between being Indian and being *mestizo*. It is both a racial and a social category, signified by indigenous physical features plus particular clothes and economic activities, most especially commerce (Harris 1995; Lazar 2008: 35).<sup>31</sup> Young *alteños* are growing up in this 'in-between' world, attempting to engage with the demands of the globalised and modern without losing their sense of the local, of belonging to El Alto and being Aymara. Ethnic ascription for young shoe-shiners, as for *cholos*, must be viewed as situational, as a social process, depending in part on circumstance. Just as *cholos* are at particular times indigenous and at others *mestizo*, shoe-shiners may emphasise or play down their occupation depending on

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<sup>31</sup> Usually the term *cholo* is counter-posed to the term *mestizo*. They both represent intermediary categories, but while the former indicates closeness to the indigenous set of values, working activities and social position, the latter underlines the adoption of a set of non-indigenous values and working activities, and a higher social status.

company and circumstance, for example depending on whether they are with work colleagues or at school or university, among peers from whom they may try and hide their occupation.<sup>32</sup>

Shoe-shiners are discriminated against for being indigenous and also for their occupation. Colorado-Mansfeld (1998) describes how race can be read in the body of an indigenous person. Focusing upon the hands, she discusses the interaction between Indian and white in the moment when an indigenous woman “places some grubby bills in the soap chaffed hands of a white-*mestizo* shopkeeper who 'recoils' from her customer.” These hands and feet render the abstract concept of economic class, concrete and unmistakeable (Weismantel and Eisenman 1998: 135).<sup>33</sup> Similarly, the occupation of a shoe-shiner may be read in the body - the way hands are covered in polish, dirt deeply embedded under nails, a smell of traffic fumes and chemical cleaners seeped into the skin and emanating from the pores, the often red, blood-shot eyes peering from behind the balaclava mask. Racialised notions of indigeneity are central to the ways in which young *alteño* shoe-shiners inhabit the urban landscape of La Paz - to the spaces where they are included or excluded. Scheper-Hughes (1998) investigates the way in which street children in Brazil are discriminated against by the police; the way in which unemployed black youth are said to steal because it is “in their blood” and are described in crudely racist terms. Although their crimes are social ones, crimes of unmet needs

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<sup>32</sup> For shifting identities in Africa see Werbner (2002).

<sup>33</sup> Indians, like whites, acknowledge clothing, hairstyles, footwear, language and gestures as aspects of race, together with decent and birthplace, the size and shape of the body, and the colour and texture of the skin and the hair. But the Indian system of race built up from these characteristics is subtly but profoundly different from the essentialism of received racism. Race appears in popular indigenous ontology as a form of knowing that is both real and historical, fixed yet fully contingent (Weismantel 1997). A theory of Andean race more in keeping with indigenous perceptions is one in which race designates a social history and a sense of being that is neither 'hard-wired' into the body, nor 'read' from it as though from a page. Instead, race accumulates within the body, in its extremities and its orifices, its organs and its impulses, as a result of a life lived within a particular human community at a specific moment in time (Weismantel and Eisenman 1998: 134).



created by the deteriorating terms of rural wage labour – their desperate acts are described as the “instinctual” crimes of an “inferior” and “debased” population (Scheper-Hughes & Sargent 1998: 379). A similar attitude is present among some paceños who have a racist attitude towards people from El Alto, a city they associate with poor moral values. Violence and fear are entangled into processes of social change in contemporary cities, generating new forms of spatial segregation and social discrimination. In recent decades, in cities as distinct as São Paulo, Los Angeles, Johannesburg, Buenos Aires, Budapest, Mexico City, and Miami, different social groups, particularly from the upper classes, have used fear of violence and crime to justify new techniques of exclusion and their withdrawal from traditional quarters of the cities (Caldeira 2001: 1). The presence of young workers in public makes them vulnerable to suspicion and aggression and young alteño shoe-shiners are often treated as deviants and criminals when they go to work in the wealthier areas of La Paz such as the Zona Sur.

The fact that crime is increasingly becoming an issue in El Alto (Lazar 2008: 33) contributes to negative attitudes of paceños (residents of La Paz) towards alteños. While the wealthy in the southern suburbs of La Paz protect themselves from the threat of crime by hiring private security, in El Alto, in what may be described as a demonstration of community responsibility, having been failed by the official legal system, alteño residents have been driven to take the law into their own hands. In recent years they have captured and tortured criminals themselves, lynching some.<sup>34</sup> Such acts have contributed to El Alto's reputation for violence and danger and also added to discrimination against young alteños working on the streets of La Paz. For instance,

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<sup>34</sup> Goldstein (2005) has discussed this issue in the city of Cochabamba, Bolivia. For a comparative perspective see Pratten's (2008) edited volume on vigilantism in Africa.

Edith, a middle class woman in her late fifties, who works as a tax collector in Sopocachi, down town La Paz, saw me talking to a group of shoe-shiners in the Plaza San Francisco and elicited a warning, *“The people up there [from El Alto] are different. When I go up there I have to wear gloves to hide my rings to stop them from cutting off my fingers.”* Bernardo Lopez, aged twenty-eight and a student at the Academia de Bellas Artes in Sopocachi, La Paz, told me *“El Alto is a city characterized by extreme ignorance, which creates poverty and disorder..... The informal economy is growing disproportionately, together with the fiestas and drunks each weekend in a supposedly very poor city. It’s not everyone in El Alto but it’s a paradox. Where do they get the money?”*

These young workers also have problems with local authorities, particularly the police. In La Paz, shoe-shiners are restricted not only from working in certain areas, but even from resting. Walking through downtown La Paz, I would see policemen ushering shoe-shiners away from central parks and grassy areas. Police are widely viewed by shoe-shiners as corrupt and frequently involved in crime, including their routinely appropriating stolen merchandise. Ismael, now aged fifteen, has worked as a shoe-shiner since leaving home at the age of seven and living briefly on the street. He described the troubles shoe-shiners have with the police,

*“A chango (guy) in the streets sometimes has to be aggressive to survive, to defend himself and to value himself. He has to respect others and be respected. Sometimes the police steal our money and take us to the Central. We have to stay locked in there for a few days and we have to pay to leave but since they have robbed us we have no money to pay. We are badly treated by the police because we have a bad appearance. When they arrest*

*us they ask how much we have for their coffee, for their cigarettes. They provoke us for no reason, only to take our money.”*

Besides these forms of discrimination, *alteño* shoe-shiners experience challenges shared by all marginalised young *alteños*, including difficulty in obtaining a formal education. Many have dropped out of their studies due to the necessity of making a living for themselves and often also their families. Ismael, who is seventeen years old, explained his situation, which is similar to that of many young shoe-shiners,

*“I shine shoes in Perez Velasco. I went to college but I have a long way to go before finishing. I should be in college this year but I don't have the money to join and afterwards to buy books and pens. I know how to read and write but not very well ... My father died when I was seven and my mother started to drink. Often when she was drunk she would beat me. She doesn't have a fixed job; she sells things, nearly always fruit, but the money doesn't cover everything and she travels a lot. We are six brothers and we all work. My sisters help my mum, one brother works in a bakery and the other is a *lustrador* (shoe-shiner) like me. Since there is no food at home we nearly all work to eat. My parents were migrants from the country. They came here to look for work but there isn't any.”*

One of the main priorities of parents, besides finding employment for themselves, has been for their children to acquire a formal education and so be able to “*avanzar*” and “*ser profesional*” (to progress and become professional). Parents will often resort to providing their own labour for building schools for their communities, hiring their own teachers, taking every conceivable step to procure an education for their children. Marta Choque de Mendoza is forty-five and lives in Germán Buchs, El Alto, with her husband, three daughters and two sons, who both work as shoe-shiners. She told me, “*I didn't go*

*to school. Formal education is important for my children because I don't want them to be like me. I want them to study and one day become professionals.*” However, whilst the adult generation say that they want their children to get a degree and have the chance of a better life, in practice they often encourage children to work instead of finishing school.

To date, young *alteños* have benefitted to an extent from Morales' introduction of the *Bono Juancito Pinto*, a bonus paid to all children attending school. However, for young shoe-shiners, this incentive is often not sufficient. Among the boys attending FND, I regularly helped two young shoe-shiners, Victor Hugo and Mikey, both fifteen years old, with their homework in the library. During my time at FND, Victor Hugo had been accused of stealing a computer from the IT room and was undergoing questioning by the Foundation. He found it difficult to focus on his studies, worried about the consequences of the alleged theft and being ostracised by his fellow-workers. Mikey worked full-time and was studying Tourism at night school. When I arrived at the library I would find him asleep on a bench, his head resting on his shoe-shine box. Reassessing the situation of these boys, and many others like them when I prepared to leave Bolivia, it was clear that few had managed to achieve their educational goals. Few had made any progress and many had dropped out of formal education, saying they did not have time and the need to make money immediately was more of a pressing concern.

In Willis' (1977) study based on a group of working class students in a British industrial town, the author asks how social reproduction is sustained at the individual level and

how to account for the subordinates' agreement with their condition. Willis points to a paradox in the fact that, at least at the beginning, the working class “lads” he studies are happy to go to work at a factory and experience it as their own free choice, while this “choice” works to preserve their social condition and class oppression. Similarly, among the young shoe-shiners, although their work is often an economic necessity, many still see the opportunity to work as an aspect of social freedom. When I first started helping out at FND, a group of mothers working as shoe-shiners requested separate English classes for themselves and their young children (without the male shoe-shiners). I organised classes and for a few weeks they seemed to be going well, but the women soon realised they were missing out on making money, and that those few hours were better spent working on the streets. Although they are keen for their children to learn English, and to be educated in general, short-term needs have to be priority.

Unlike the “lads” in Willis' study, however, young *alteño* shoe-shiners have not developed a 'counter school culture' built on a repertoire of privileging practical knowledge, life experience and “street wisdom” over theoretical knowledge. On the contrary, although they value lessons learned on the street and strive to make the best of their situation, the majority ultimately seek to attain a formal education at school and university. Willis argues that the “lads” are aware of the fact that what will determine the fate of their class is not the acquiring of skill, as held by the individual ethos, but the requirements of the labour market. Among the young shoe-shiners, even if a person holding a university degree or other academic qualification will never work within his profession, the attainment of formal education represents a form of symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1972). For example, one of the boys at FND, “Edmundo II,” had trained as a lawyer but, failing to find work, had returned to work on the streets as a shoe-shiner. He

was particularly highly regarded amongst the other boys, as a figure of authority and wisdom, and works as a teacher in the IT centre at FND. Even within the realm of shoe-shining his academic credentials have helped him gain extra funds and a position of authority.

The shoe-shiners complain about their city, El Alto; its lack of provisions, especially educational resources, and the excessive consumption of alcohol. Alejandro Sullcamamani, a nineteen year old shoe-shiner, told me,

*“El Alto has progressed with the ex-alcalde Pepe Lucho Paredes and the fight for the people but the bars and canteens should be closed because they damage the young people, their thought to make changes for the country... There’s internet, juegos en red, libraries, but we need a large library with all the books necessary to complete different homework.”*

Echoing this opinion, Jhonny Limachi, a shoe-shiner and engineering student living on the *laderas* (slopes between El Alto and La Paz) said *“The video games in El Alto stop educational development. Without education there’s no progress and no future.”* Despite these shortcomings, they do not wish to leave but, rather, talk about how the situation can be improved. In the following section I explore the ways in which young shoe-shiners are dealing with such discrimination and exclusion, making a claim on the city of La Paz through a combination of formal and informal strategies. Despite – or perhaps because of – this array of challenges, they display surprising resilience and maintain hope for a future in which they will “progress” and “become professional.”

## Creative Solutions: Urban Networks and Street Survival

Since these young people are second and third generation Aymara migrants, the concept of working at a young age is familiar to them. Indeed, in an Aymara context, child work is commonly regarded as an important element of personhood. During the colonial period, while the official transition to adulthood was set at twenty-one according to European custom, children of lower classes assumed roles and responsibilities at much earlier ages.<sup>35</sup> Today, in poor rural households, labour needs are high and all family members above five years of age are expected to contribute to the survival of the household (Holloway and Valentine 2000: 48). Young *alteños* often return to their parent's or grandparent's *pueblo* (village) of origin on the altiplano to assist with planting and harvesting. However, working children do not sit comfortably with Western views about children and childhood. Since the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989, there has been a shift in public discourse from a focus on welfare to rights. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) has been trying to prohibit child labour worldwide for decades but the crucial difference between 'labour' and work' in this context, with labour being forced and work being voluntary, is frequently overlooked: often any young person, either labouring or working in the global market economy, is seen as a child who is robbed of the proper experiences and practices that

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35 Fifteen or sixteen years seems to have been the age at which working youth were able to undertake professions. While little mention of children is made in documentary sources, there are records of arranged apprenticeships. According to these sources, boys were apprenticed at around eight to twelve years of age, with the understanding that they would be fully trained and able to pursue their intended professions by age fifteen or sixteen (Hecht 2002: 45). Guaman Poma de Ayala [1615] (1988): 179-89, 201-9), a native Andean author and artist working at the beginning of the seventeenth century, drew pictures of Andean children and described their function in Pre-Hispanic Inca society. Inca children of ages five through nine were assigned certain tasks. Boys of this age aided their parents and community by watching over younger siblings, performing various domestic chores, and helping to raise orphans. Guaman Poma contrasts the pre-Conquest usefulness of this age group to domestic organisation with the post-Conquest practice of removing these boys from their homes to educate them. Girls from ages five to nine served as pages for important females; they also helped their parents by collecting firewood and straw as well as spinning, gathering edible wild plants, minding younger children, fetching water, cooking, cleaning and assisting with animal husbandry.

constitute childhood (Roberts 1998). Young shoe-shiners represent a small section of the population of young workers in El Alto and La Paz and the occupation of shoe-shining does not fall into the category of 'labour.' These young people want to work and to be supported by the government.

Today, young workers are increasingly taking control of the situation themselves. During the approval of the proposal of the new Political Constitution of the State (CPE) in 2009, associations and federations of child and adolescent workers mobilised in the streets of La Paz to ask that the right of young people to work be included in this legal document. Alejandro, a student and worker told me, *"We want to work. We are doing this march to ask that we are included in the Constitution, that the laws protect us, that we are not exploited or discriminated against, so that we can work and study at the same time."* In 2011, the Bolivian Union of Working Children and Adolescents (UNATsBO) submitted a draft bill to "recognise, promote and protect the rights of working children."<sup>36</sup> The bill was composed by the young people and aims to guarantee rights to working youth, protecting them from discrimination and exploitation.

The prevailing narrative of international NGOs operating in Bolivia (and worldwide) is one of pity and paternalism. As with many interventions in the fields of 'development,' rather than work with communities whose young people work instead of attending school or college, many organisations are working on them, forcing them out of jobs that represent the best of a narrow range of possibilities by imposing their own moral framework. Organisations that give support to young workers typically focus either on providing services, 'rehabilitating' them, or 'organising' them. NGOs that work on

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<sup>36</sup> <http://www.crin.org/resources/infodetail.asp?id=26866>



rehabilitation issues usually provide institutional homes to try to end cycles of homelessness, alcohol or drug use or domestic violence, and to prevent street workers from being a nuisance to the public. They aim to get children and young people off the streets.<sup>37</sup> Many shoe-shiners take what they can from these institutions but are clued-in to the fact that they offer no real long term solution. Some organisations provide free medical care and support but only to children up to the age of eighteen and those with a religious slant often have conditions, for example the requirement that a young person attend a school of a particular religious denomination until the age of eighteen. Among the institutions that offer services are Fundación Nuevo Día, Fundación La Paz, Arco Iris and Vamos Juntos. FND is unique in the abundance of services provided for shoe-shiners; locker storage, a counselling service, showers, a library, capoeira lessons, computers, training in woodwork and carpentry. Young shoe-shiners are able to engage with business development and are provided with a legal personality by being connected to a registered organisation. Their involvement with the Foundation assists them in achieving both long and short-term goals.

In Alto today, the informal economy continues to flourish alongside the formalisation of previously informal occupations, such as shoe-shining. Unlike informal alternatives on the street such as performing acrobatics or washing car windows at traffic lights, busking, working as a *voceador* (shouting bus routes), *dulcero* (sweet seller) or *canillita* (paper-seller) (Rizzini et al. 1992), shoe-shining has the potential to offer a degree of security. Young *alteño* shoe-shiners are increasingly formalising their work in order to improve their working conditions and quality of life in the city. In La Paz, young shoe-shiners can join one of fourteen associations. These territorially based associations are

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<sup>37</sup> Examples in La Paz and El Alto include the Mayor's Citizens Rights office, Fundación La Paz's Okarikuna program, Hogar Bernabe, Comunidad Juan Pablo XXIII, and Alalay.

self-organised groups that lobby for local government recognition and channel information and projects from outside organisations to their members so they can campaign for improved living conditions, education and healthcare. Shoe-shiners who choose not to join or who have been barred for past behaviour (such as fighting, crime, delinquency – drug and alcohol abuse) are not allowed to work in the territory of the associations, which patrol their area on a rotating basis. The majority of young shoe-shiners do belong to one of these associations, which demand that members attend meetings, wear official uniforms, follow internal rules and regulations, and pay monetary quotas. The organisations are managed by elected boards and coordinate with other vendor associations that occupy the same geographical space, usually a specific plaza or street.

A young person may begin working as a shoe-shiner with the expectation that it will be a temporary occupation, perhaps enabling sufficient earnings to pay university fees. He will not feel the need to form bonds through work as the initial priority is to gain an education. However, as links with a particular shoe-shining association strengthen and bonds do inevitably form, a particular self-narrative begins to evolve in which the young person finds pride in his work – in his involvement in fighting for change, putting pressure on the government to increase legal recognition. The life of Pablo Marani is one such instance. Now in his late twenties and working as a shoe-shiner, Pablo was born in the village of Humapalka, Laricaja (Department of La Paz), the eldest son of nine surviving children of eleven. His father had abandoned the family, and his mother was struggling to support her many offspring so Pablo, then aged seven, was sent to El Alto. It was here that he first encountered street life, what he now refers to as “the bad life”; sniffing glue (the cheapest drug he could acquire), drinking, stealing,

getting into trouble with the police, spending time in jail. He learned from other children on the streets the multiple common tactics and codes of survival.<sup>38</sup> Pablo has shoulder-length hair, immaculately gelled, and always wears sunglasses. The first time I met him I felt uneasy, unable to see his eyes as he leant towards me, telling me how we could collaborate on a project he had planned. (I learned later that he always wears sunglasses because one eye is missing, torn from his face by a broken bottle in a fight with another shoe-shiner outside a bar near Alonso de Mendoza).

When I arrived in La Paz, Pablo and Hernán (the Director of FND) had recently received a grant of 50,000 Euros from a Worker's Union in Belgium. They had written a lengthy and detailed proposal outlining the formation of a federation (Hernán wrote as Pablo never learned to read or write; he told me he attended “the university of the street”), which would involve uniting all the associations of La Paz into one legal body. By the time I left Bolivia a year and a half later Hernán and Pablo had opened a bank account, received the funds, rented an office in La Paz and organised a number of workshops for adult and young shoe-shiners, informing them of the need to unite to form a federation and of the rewards to be reaped. Pablo Marani has played – and continues to play – a crucial role in encouraging the participation of young shoe-shiners in campaigns demanding that their work be officially recognised. He is the President of the association Los Heroés, democratically elected by '*los changos*' (the guys), well known and respected among the shoe-shiners of La Paz.

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<sup>38</sup> Pablo met his wife Pilar when they were teenagers and both living on the street. One day a woman from Potosí who had been begging in La Paz approached them and asked if they would care for her baby. This new responsibility inspired Pablo to begin work as a shoe-shiner. Two years later the couple adopted another abandoned child. Today, Pablo, Pilar, Kevin and Jhenny live in a house overlooking a square in Rio Seco, El Alto. Although, over the years, two floors have been added, the family lives only in one downstairs room divided by a curtain into a sitting room/bedroom. Pilar works from home as a hairdresser and has recently started selling *papas rellenas* (stuffed potatoes) in the market.

Formalising their work by joining an association does not solve all their problems and, until employment options increase, shoe-shiners use a wide range of innovative strategies to make a place for themselves on the streets of La Paz. Moyer's (2004) study of a particular street corner in Dar es Salaam aims to reveal the way that processes of globalisation, specifically neo-liberal discourses and practices, mediate daily life for those who earn their living on the fringes of an emergent economy tied to new global spaces. She describes the way young people employ spatial tactics to improve the quality of their work and leisure and cause disruption – a form of resistance despite/against state strategies to control and order space. These include tactics such as transforming street corners and sidewalks into businesses, relaxing and smoking marijuana in a particular location, or choosing certain routes through the city to avoid police harassment (Moyer 2004: 132). While some of these actions may be considered to be perpetuating a corrupt system, they also produce '*moments of freedom*' (Fabian 1998) and '*spaces of hope*' (Harvey 2000). Such moments and spaces are important because they demonstrate how individuals and groups create environments where they can live their own lives.

Scott (1990) provides a framework for understanding how marginalised groups are able to challenge power relations through social transcripts, making an important distinction between 'public' and 'hidden' transcripts. The public transcript is a “shorthand way of describing the open interaction between subordinates and those who dominate.” It represents a transcript of power that perpetuates the established social order. In contrast, the hidden transcript is one of resistance and describes “discourse that takes place 'offstage,' or in disguised form” (Scott 1990: 2). Created by subordinate groups, a hidden transcript represents “a critique of power spoken behind the back of the

dominant” (Scott 1990: xii). These hidden transcripts act as “vehicles by which they insinuate a critique of power while hiding behind anonymity or behind innocuous understandings of their conduct” (Scott 1990: xiii). A subtle yet significant example of resistance and empowerment used by young alteño shoe-shiners is '*coba*,' the language of the street; a code consisting of words used more or less in reverse by shoe-shiners and other young street workers. I first became aware of this phenomenon whilst visiting another NGO in El Alto, Casa Kantuta, which aims to help young girls leave prostitution by providing employment in a bakery. I was introduced to some of the girls and, having spoken a few sentences with them in Spanish, they began talking between themselves in an unfamiliar language. I later asked the shoe-shiners if they were aware of this language as I had not heard it used at FND. Mikey told me, “*‘Coba’ is our language of the street, which we speak amongst ourselves. It’s to protect us because when we speak in coba the people don’t understand us. This helps us when we are pressured by the police. It’s easy, you can learn fast and we all know it.*” Through learning and speaking this code the young shoe-shiners achieve membership into a community of other speakers and therefore empower themselves to resist interferences by the police and other 'outsiders.'<sup>39</sup> Beazley found a similar phenomenon among street children in Indonesia and describes the use of their own slang or private language as a distinctive part of the street children subculture. The vocabulary relates to events, objects and activities which are regularly used by the children. She describes the way in which the Tikyan language creates a realm of autonomy and solidarity, reinforcing a sense of belonging (Beazley 1999).

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<sup>39</sup> Victor Hugo Viscarra published a book on *coba* (1991). At the age of fifteen, he experienced domestic abuse and moved to live on the streets of La Paz, where he learned this language of the 'underworld and criminals.'

The balaclava is another of these instruments, part of the repertoire of resistance deployed by shoe-shiners against economic and social discrimination. Since many used to live in the streets, the masks help them remain anonymous. Ismael, from FND, explained the significance of the balaclava.

*“Well, the people think that we are bad like thugs, but it’s not like that. It’s because people criticise us and treat us as if we are nothing. Sometimes those who go to college are ashamed of their friends because they know that they shine shoes.”*

The balaclava conceals individual identity but, at the same time, it makes shoe-shiners more conspicuous as a group and therefore may be considered as a tool of resistance, creating solidarity between workers. De Meis (1999), conducting research on prostitution in Brazil, describes the ways in which the women tried to prevent their sex work from contaminating their private lives. One technique was to use a *nom de guerre* – a fictitious name. Similarly, Castañeda et al (1996), studying prostitutes in Mexico City, point out that clothes and make-up are used by prostitutes to prevent the stigma of prostitution from touching their private lives and describe the way in which the face is cleaned, clothing is changed, and a rebirth occurs, a form of purification ritual, before returning home. For these young *alteños*, the balaclava serves a similar purpose to the *nom de guerre* and make-up, enabling them to lead double lives, switching between the two depending upon where they are and who they are with. Although they can recognise each other whilst wearing balaclavas, many shoe-shiners are ashamed of revealing their occupation to, for example, other students in their class at school or university due to negative stereotypes as delinquents and criminals. However, the balaclava helps them to inhabit the city as a united force. They are easily recognisable whether sitting on the

street awaiting custom or pacing through the city to reach their territory or another frequented site such as FND.

While it is true that young shoe-shiners face much discrimination on the streets of La Paz many do have their own patrons with whom they have established a bond of trust over a number of years. For many businessmen in La Paz, the act of paying to have shoes polished by another person is a sign of prestige. A number of shoe-shiners spoke of the kindness of their patrons, who were loyal in providing custom and paid generously. Focusing upon shoe-shiners in Nairobi, Elkan et al. describe how different prices are charged to city-dwellers, those from the country and foreign tourists (1982: 250). The main customers of the shoe-shiners in La Paz are not tourists but locals of the intermediate category, that is, those working as shop assistants, office clerks, civil servants of lower grades, none of whom have servants but all of whom like to look smart. Steel (2008) has described how, in Cusco, Peru, other vendors often look down on shoe-shiners as they can immediately spend the money they have earned and have no need to buy more goods as for example a postcard seller (*postalero*) would. They do not consider shoe-shiners as real vendors but as loafers or drifters who are just hanging around in the streets. However, in La Paz, young *alteños* often seek to distinguish themselves from those who live in the streets, therefore the outward signs that a young person is working - such as the shoeshine box, are symbols that a young person is “good” and should not be perceived as a threat.

The city is in itself an environmental education and can be used to provide one, whether we are thinking of learning through the city, learning about the city, learning to use the city, to control the city or to change the city (Ward 1990: 153). Young shoe-shiners new

to working in La Paz must 'learn the city'; the places they can and cannot go, the ways in which they must use the street to their advantage, based upon knowledge of urban networks, "geographies of resistance," material and psychological boundaries based on racism. Rather than assuming that learning is the reception of factual knowledge or information, Lave and Wenger (1991) argue that is a process of participation in communities of practice - participation that is at first legitimately peripheral but that increases gradually in engagement and complexity. Viviana and Claudia, two female shoe-shiners who regularly travel up from their designated territory in the Zona Sur to have tea at FND are responsible for a small group of shoe-shiners all less than twelve years of age. These two women act as their guardians, teaching them the trade whilst watching out for them. The knowledge transmission between generations is quintessentially social in character (Lave and Wenger 1991) and many bonds are formed and lessons learned through informal apprenticeships, with older workers teaching younger, often relatives or children of friends.

As described in the previous chapter, the collective is a shared value among rural-urban migrants, and rural bonds are often recreated in the city, with migrants moving to a shared zone in El Alto (Miracle and Yapita 1981; Lazar 2008). The view, common in the public imagination, of shoe-shiners being immoral and dangerous is due in part to the fact that they are often believed to be working on the streets as the result of neglect or abandonment by their families. However, whilst a number of young people who now work as shoe-shiners have spent time living on the street,<sup>40</sup> the majority are not

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40 One boy, who previously lived on the streets and now works as a shoe-shiner, told me, "*What happens is that to sleep in the street we need to be a bit drunk or drugged because the places where we sleep are horrible, they smell bad, there is a lot of rubbish and the nights are very cold here in La Paz. We sleep in the street, in abandoned places, in the parks, in the wood, in places where no-one lives. We look for covered holes to be protected from the rain, often near the autopista between La Paz and El Alto. We arrange cartons and crates to make it more comfortable to spend the night. We have to change sites all the time because the police bother us.*"



homeless but live with parents, or sometimes with other relatives or friends. They are 'on the street' not 'of the street' (Fyfe 1998: 99). Calestani (2012) discusses the various ways in which the value of the collective is embraced by young people in El Alto, commenting that, despite the importance of the peer group, the household still represents a fundamental aspect of young people's lives and is integral to their idea of well-being (Calestani 2012). Many young shoe-shiners begin the trade as a result of contacts already established through parents or other relatives working as shoe-shiners. There is also an eagerness to create belonging through brotherhood amongst peers. As White (2002) has pointed out, in the case of child workers in Bangladesh, kinship terms are commonly used in employment. Similarly, young *alteño* shoe-shiners frequently call each other "*hermano*" (brother) or "*mi hermano menor*" (my little brother), conveying affection as well as a recognition of a disparity in experience of working on the street.

For young shoe-shiners, social events often involve parents, friends, girlfriends and siblings, all connected through the boys being in the same shoe-shining association. I frequently attended inter-association football matches at Rio Seco, one of the furthest barrios from La Ceja and also one of the poorest zones of El Alto. It is here that many of the shoe-shiners live. A large football pitch sits alongside the main campus of the Universidad Pública de El Alto. Each team has its own strip and each member has various responsibilities in organising the day, such as ensuring the strips have been washed, collecting a small fee from each member (to cover the cost of hiring the pitch), providing alcoholic and non-alcoholic refreshment. The supporting family members, women and children, sit on the sidelines leaving babies to entertain themselves, rolling in the dust at their feet. The football match is one of the most eagerly anticipated events on the social calendar of the shoe-shiners and contributes to the establishment of close

bonds between work colleagues and their families. Another eagerly awaited date, for the association Los Heroés, is the annual trip to Isla del Sol. The members contribute to the hire of a mini-bus and a group of around twenty shoe-shiners drive to Copacabana, on the shores of lake Titicaca, high on the altiplano to the west of La Paz, about three hours away, and then catch a ferry to the Isla del Sol. They take supplies of Inca cola and *singani* and a football. They play, eat, drink, share stories of work and family life. This 'holiday' is only for a day and yet the anticipation of the event, the planning and excitement, begins months in advance.

Despite the failings of their city, young alteño shoe-shiners are increasingly allowing themselves to have hope. Due to the support of Morales there is a greater chance than ever before that their claims to the benefits of modernity, to which they have to date been denied access, will be fulfilled. There is a sense of determination, among these young people, to move beyond the confines of the present; to have dreams and ambitions. Regarding child workers in Bangladesh, White (2002) says that 'Poverty formed the context of the children's lives, the limits of the possible and what could be spoken of. Attempts to probe whether they saw themselves as members of a common social group with wealthier children brought either silence or anger....Only in talking to adults who had formerly worked as children was it possible to discuss this issue properly. .... to dwell on the contrast would simply drive them mad' (White 2002: 733). Similarly, Kahveci tells us that, for shoe-shiners in Izmir, Turkey, a 'proper occupation' signifies greater security and that nearly all shoe-shiners hold what dreams they have in check because they cannot afford to place too much hope on the future (Kahveci 1996: 59). In contrast to the child workers described by White and Kahveci, the majority of young alteño shoe-shiners want to talk about their plans for the future.

Such aspirations and looking towards the future may be considered another form of resistance.

Some ambitions are unrealistic; impossible dreams for the future. For example, one young man, in his mid-twenties, told me “When I go in a plane, I'll stick my hand out of the window and eat snow.” Such comments point not only to the naivety of some of these young people regarding knowledge beyond the realms of their own world but also demonstrate their certainty that the future will be brighter; that their lives as they are now are in a temporary phase of difficulty. On another occasion, helping Mikey from FND with his homework, he asked me if I'd ever seen the sea, and then how big it is compared to Lake Titicaca. Whereas the reality is that many of these young people will never see the sea, they allow themselves to imagine going in an aeroplane. Hope for the future plays a significant part in giving them the determination and resilience to deal with the challenges of the present.

Exploring the 'work of hope' among dispossessed youth in post-Socialist Mongolia, Pedersen (2012) accompanies his Mongolian friends in a Cadillac for a day around Ulaanbaatar. Describing the way in which they appear to be surprisingly hopeful, considering the daily struggles they face, he says “Far from accepting that the best they can aim for is to muddle pragmatically through the hardships of the so-called transition from state socialism to market capitalism or to indulge in passive daydreaming of a better life, my friends continue to act as if tomorrow will be a better day by stubbornly making new debts and entering into new trading adventures” (Pedersen 2012: 2). As Pedersen comments, the concept of hope allows for the potentials of the moment to overflow the possibilities of the present (Pedersen 2012: 1). Sometimes this is an

'impossible' (unrealisable) future that is subject to inherent destruction, transformation, and renewal (Pedersen 2012: 12). Among disadvantaged young people, hope is embodied in their determined belief that hard work and personal moral choices produce one's future. It is an agentic element in people's lives; it moves people into action in the present.

These young shoe-shiners live, as they must, for the moment. However, living for the moment is not necessarily the same as living in the present "with little thought for the future and little interest in the past" (Day, Papataxiarchis, and Stewart 1999: 2). For where the latter characterisation may possibly be ascribed to the most deprived inhabitants of certain cities in sub-Saharan Africa, America and Europe, it does not seem to apply when it comes to marginal peoples like my friends in El Alto, for whom the more a person is able to live for each and every moment, the more he or she is also able to escape from the present in its presentist, fatalist, and millenarian sense (Pedersen 2012: 9). Rather than demonstrating the lack of interest in the future, living for the moment involves an exalted awareness of the virtual potentials of the present.

## **Conclusion**

Young *alteño* shoe-shiners must negotiate the worlds of home, school or university, local and foreign agencies, institutions, street, and all that these different spaces entail in terms of acceptable self-narratives. They navigate the city of La Paz daily, creating opportunities, meaning and a sense of belonging. There is a widely held view that people flock into occupations like shoe-shining because they are insufficiently

motivated to do a days work, lack direction and are a disgrace to society (Elkan et al. 1982: 254), yet this is not the case. When unemployment is extreme, shoe-shining can provide opportunities and shoe-shiners should not be denied the chance to meet the demand of the many customers. Finally this work force is in the process of being recognised. Whether they work alone or as a member of an association, challenges to those involved in the occupation of shoe-shining are great and an irreconcilable gap exists between their aspirations for a better life and the possibilities of achieving such a life. However, as the population of El Alto and subsequently the rate of unemployment soar, shoe-shining is currently enabling these young people to make a living - and a life - in the city. Through formal and informal strategies, including “geographies of resistance” and the motivational powers of hope, they engage with the demands of modernity and make a claim on the city; they attain a sense of belonging to a strong community, contribute to social change, find self-respect and a degree of security in a particularly uncertain world.

This group represents just one way in which young alteños are taking matters into their own hands and demanding change on their own terms. The following chapters will explore alternative ways in which alteño youth are confronting marginalisation, focusing upon the re-imagining of indigeneity currently underway among this section of the population.



**Fig. 8: Association Los Heroés being presented with chicken and *panetone* for Christmas 2009 at the back of the Casa de La Cultura, El Prado, La Paz**



**Fig. 9: Fundación Nuevo Día football team**





**Fig. 10: Posesión Los Heroés: Los Heroés association registering with the authorities**



**Fig. 11: A workshop for young shoe-shiners in La Paz**

### Chapter III

#### **To Rule by Obeying: The Influence of Evo Morales and the MAS (Movement towards Socialism) on the Politics of Young Alteños**

*“In our country the political is like our daily bread. Everyone should be involved ... I am discriminated against for not knowing Aymara! The cultural and social revolution of Evo has opened many doors for young people. In El Alto there’s a big space of debate and sometimes violence”*

Ica Castro, a young alteño shoe-shiner

*“Aymara can be used by government as a way of coming to power. Morales’ identity very much influences the people who trust him. He uses his identity in a negative way because he excludes part of the population for not identifying with the same culture.”*

Efrain Chipana, a young alteño student at UMSA

Evo Morales has declared himself to be a President who rules by obeying the people (*mandar obedeciendo*). At his inauguration speech in Tiwanaku he proclaimed “I want to ask you, with much respect to our indigenous authorities, our organisations, our *amautas* (wise ones): control me, and, if I cannot advance, you push me on, sisters and brothers.... Correct me all the time; it is possible that I might make mistakes, I can make mistakes, we all make mistakes, but I will never betray the struggle of the Bolivian people” (Stefanoni 2011). Indigenous people and social movements have been organising for decades, seeking cultural recognition and more inclusive representation (Albó 1994, 1996, 2002; Dunkerley 1984, 2007a; Hylton and Thomson 2007), yet Morales' election is the culmination of a striking new kind of activism. Born out of a



history of resistance to colonial racism, and developed in collective struggles against the post-revolutionary state since 1952, this kind of activism has crystallised over the past decade. For these new social movements the notion of indigeneity plays an important articulating function, linking together diverse political interests and subject positions.

There are many aspects of Evo Morales' behaviour as president which may be considered part of (an)other political matrix. For example, he first gave his oath in the *ayllu* of Tiwanaku, also known as Winay Marka or eternal city, widely considered a sacred site among Aymara peoples and the location, in the 1970s, where Aymara activists met to launch the Katarista movement (Blaser et al. 2010). Morales' ceremony thus resonated both with indigenous historical memory, and with more recent histories of political mobilisation. On January 21st, 2006, the president-elect of the republic processed into the archaeological precinct, dressed in a tunic and headpiece styled according to ancient Tiwanaku patterns. He identified himself with heroes of the past, requesting a minutes silence for "Manko Inka, Tupaj Katari, Tupac Amaru, Bartolina Sisa, Zárate Willka, Atihuaiqui Tumpa, Andrés Ibáñez, Che Guevara, Marcelo Quiroga Santa Cruz, Luis Espinal and many of my fallen brothers..." (Dunkerley 2007b: 22). Wielding an Indian staff of authority he proclaimed "The Aymara people will once again rule – the *Pachakuti* has arrived."<sup>41</sup>

A group of Aymara elders recognised Morales as their leader in this public ceremony, using ritual offerings to request support from *Pachamama* (Mother Earth) and other deities. Such offerings to *Pachamama* (known as *pagos*, *despachos*, *misas* or *ch'allas*),

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<sup>41</sup> On past and present cycles of indigenous mobilisation and the notion of Pachakuti, see Hylton and Thomson (2007).

were not first used in political situations by Morales but became public during the Water and Gas Wars of 2000 and 2003. However, since Morales' inauguration, libations to the earth before a political conversation, for example – have made their way into the main quarters of the Bolivian state (De la Cadena 2010: 336).<sup>42</sup> Considering the centuries of despotic and authoritarian rule in Bolivia, the approach of Morales - his efforts to bring indigenous people from the margin to the centre of the state - represents a major shift in ideas about power, authority and leadership. This shift has encouraged the emergence of multiple discourses on indigeneity and acted as a catalyst in the process of re-imagining indigeneity underway among marginalised young *alteños*.

This chapter firstly investigates the political rhetoric and state ceremonialism displayed by Morales in the celebration of Aymara New Year at Tiwanaku. It discusses the use of emblems of indigeneity, such as language, dress, the *wiphala* (flag of indigenous nations), and *coca* and alcohol in the practice of *ch'alla* rituals to *Pachamama* and compares the various meanings of the event to young *alteños*, indigenous rural people and the state. It argues that, despite being an “invented tradition,” through an emphasis upon the use of indigenous (and particularly Aymara) symbols and practices, Aymara New Year acts as a channel for Morales to demonstrate solidarity with *el pueblo* (the people). These people are not specifically the rural or urban indigenous, the young or old. They may be people who have neither a real claim to indigenous identity or knowledge of an indigenous language. Aymara New Year is an expression of the fluidity of Morales' use of indigeneity; his use of the concept as a political tool. The multiple ways of being indigenous employed by President Morales, who claims to be anti-

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42 Relations with other-than-human beings take place along with activities such as participating in judiciary trials, organising a workers union, participating in environmental NGOs, even working for a capitalist organisation (de la Cadena 2010: 353)

capitalism and anti-globalisation, are addressed. One of the ironies of globalisation is that it allows local groups access to concepts such as indigeneity with which to oppose other aspects of globalisation. In Bolivia, indigeneity is becoming the language of protests over resources and the defence of the *patria* (homeland). Morales is using this global, ambiguously defined indigeneity, which provides a language of political engagement for a much broader public, to gain political support through public performances of indigeneity in events which may be considered “invented tradition” (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983).

Secondly, this chapter proposes that the concept of the “lettered city” (Rama 1984) in which Indians were previously transformed into *mestizos* through processes of literacy and urbanisation, is currently being redefined - even inverted - as the Indian is reborn in the city and indigenous knowledge is increasingly re-evaluated and valued. Thirdly, it explores the extent to which young *alteños* consider Morales a role model, relying on the President and his party to make positive changes to their community and country. Just as the government emphasises indigenous traits to gain support, so young *alteños* emphasise similar traits in order to gain access to resources, to increase their opportunities and improve their living conditions. This chapter investigates the narratives emerging among marginalised young *alteños* as they express their indigenenity on their own terms in their every day lives; their contributions to the construction of new indigenous identities and state imaginings beyond the racialised discourses of the past. Finally, this chapter considers opposition to the government by the East which, through its own performances, makes claims to autonomy and power. It addresses the impact of this opposition on the attitudes of young *alteños* towards Morales and the MAS.

## Political Rhetoric and State Ceremonialism in Contemporary Bolivia

“To successfully resist ongoing systems of domination, racial or ethnic stereotyping, and cultural hegemony, the first necessity of disempowered peoples, or of marginalised subcultural groups within a national society, is that of constructing a shared understanding of the historical past that enables them to understand their present conditions as a result of their own ways of making history” (Hill 1996).

In the Andes, as elsewhere, people often manifest a keen nostalgia for ways of life and knowledge thought to be traditional and lamented as otherwise forgotten, degraded and increasingly inaccessible. This concern has emerged as a salient dimension of political action and consciousness (Albó 1987, 1994; Briggs 1996; Jackson 1995; Rappaport 1994; White 1991; Whitten et al. 1997). The recuperation of such tradition is often held both to constitute an authorising local identity and to forge solidarities taken as the natural base of ethnic and national inclusion (Foster 1991; Handler 1988). Harris (1995: 105) points out the ironic links between this sense of forgotten tradition and the knowledge forms of colonial chronicles and scholarly discourse; official genres of indigenous history and the subordinate identity it is held to convey, which have served to attribute this lack of self-knowledge to indigenous Americans, and redeem it through ‘the creation of a lost object.’ Aymara New Year may be considered to be the creation of such a lost object. There are many arguments against the legitimacy of the holiday as a whole, with there being limited historical evidence about the event before the arrival of the Spanish.<sup>43</sup> However, Aymara New Year is surrounded by an aura of antiquity, being celebrated at the ancient ruins of Tiwanaku. It is an example of the construction of an

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43 It has been suggested that Aymara New Year was engendered from the Incan festival of *Inti Raymi* (the sun god). Inca Emperor Pachacutec imposed the celebration on all Incan and conquered people in the sixteenth century. Furthermore, when the Spanish arrived, they made no record of an Aymara New Year but did write about *Inti Raymi* (Sarmiento de Gamboa [1572] (2007); Cobo [1653] (1990).

indigenous ritual/ tradition by Morales and the MAS.

The Winter Solstice was previously known as “Noche de San Juan” - a Christian holiday, traditionally celebrated with bonfires, which took place on the 24<sup>th</sup> June. It was banned when bonfires were branded as “environmental hazards” and made illegal and changed to 'Aymara New Year' on the 21<sup>st</sup> June. Aymara New Year was declared a national holiday in 2009 by President Morales. This decision increased the celebration; more vendors and entertainers come out and the crowds have multiplied. Since Bolivia's constitution defines the country as 'plurinational,' imposing an Aymara holiday has proved unpopular amongst non-Aymara citizens, of which there are thirty-six other indigenous groups with their own festivals that remain undeclared.

It is not only the event of Aymara new Year which is an “invented tradition”; the actual site of Tiwanaku has also been re-invented previously. In Gotkowitz's recent edited volume (2011), exploring the connections between present day discrimination and centuries of colonialism and violence in Latin America, Qayum describes the way in which the archaeological site at Tiwanaku became the source of local, regional, and national appropriations and dissensions in early twentieth-century Bolivia. This landscape of abandoned ruins was intellectually reconstructed into a political monument that stood for a potent past imbued with nationalist meaning that salvaged the present from a history of ostensible racial and civilizational decline. After generations of republican debate over the relative merits of the Inca and Spanish empires, Tiwanaku emerged as a compelling alternative to both Inca-centered and Spanish-centered narratives of the past. In the early nineteenth century, the Geographic Society of La Paz, an institution on the cusp of state and civil society, produced a body of historical and

ethnographic knowledge asserting the primordial status of ancient Tiwanaku as an Andean and American civilization, and as fundamentally Aymara<sup>44</sup> (Gotkowitz 2011: 159). Tiwanaku and Aymara civilization provided raw material for Bolivian Creole intellectuals to develop a distinctive *indigenismo* that eventually served the nationalist project culminating in the 1952 National Revolution. The Geographic Society of La Paz made a particular rhetoric of race and civilization tangible (Gotkowitz 2011: 172). “Race” was deployed not just to structure discourses of rights, citizenship, entitlement, and to mark difference, but also to create spatial and temporal hierarchies.

Since the resurgence of political party activities in recent decades, people have been all too aware of the politicisation of traditional ritual, the choreographing of ‘ritual in the battle for public support’ (Kertzer 1988: 107).<sup>45</sup> Albro analyses the persuasiveness of ritual libations in provincial Bolivia as populist spectacles (Albro 2001b). As explicit custom, *ch’allas* (ritual offerings to *Pachamama*) refer to the obvious differences between the past and the present. During an era of extensive national reform, these libations are prototypical definitional performances within a changing regional political arena. Albro describes the way in which the Mayor of Quillacollo, Cochabamba, is seen carrying out a *ch’alla* on heavy road machinery. The significance of this offering to

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44 Tiwanaku was an ancient city-state located just south of lake Titicaca on the altiplano, or highland plateau, of La Paz. Emerging around 200 C.E., Tiwanaku became the leading political and religious site within the Lake Titicaca basin by about 500 C.E. It subsequently became the centre of an extended territorial and trade network expanding westward to coastal Peru, to the fertile valleys east of Lake Titicaca as well as to Cochabamba, and reaching as far south as northern Chile. Tiwanaku suddenly entered into decline and collapsed around 1100 C.E (See Kolata 1993. For a critique of the explanations of decline and an alternative argument for continuity see Erickson 1999). As the Inca state expanded in the fourteenth century, it sought legitimacy through symbolic links with the Titicaca basin and the prestigious Tiwanaku civilization. When Spanish chroniclers such as Cieza de León arrived in the region in the mid-sixteenth century, they collected Inca and local Andean myths involving this sacred site (Cieza de León, *Crónica de Perú* (1553: Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Españoles, 1947). In the nineteenth century the ruins were visited by a long list of European travellers and scholars who published studies or memoirs of their stays ((Von Tschudi (1851), Comte de Castelnau (1850-61), Angrand (1866), Raimondi (1874), Squier (1877), and Weiner (1880)). It was on these foundations that turn-of-the-century *letrados* (the lettered elites) associated with the Geographic Society of La Paz would construct their indigenista interpretations of the local and national significance of Tiwanaku.

45 For a comparative approach on state ceremonialism in Israel see Handelman (1997).

*Pachamama* has not been lost despite the fact that the ground is now concrete pavement rather than actual earth. This affair is typical of the complexly hybrid and urban provincial arena of the so-called post-peasant (Warren 1998; Canclini 1995; Kearney 1995) and, as such, these populist libations defy many conventional ethnographic renderings of Andean cultural practice and ethnic identity (Starn 1991, 1994).

In his study of the contemporary encounter between Catholic missionaries and Aymara Indians, Orta (1998) explores the pastoral shift away from liberation theology that dominated Latin American missionisation up until the mid-1980s to the recent “theology of inculturation” which upholds the beliefs and practices of a supposedly pristine Aymara culture as indigenous expressions of a more universal Christianity. He describes the way in which the rhetoric of inculturation entails a metacultural focus on particular Aymara traits, for example prototypical exchange practices such as *ayni* and highly formalised ritual actions such as *waxt’as* (burnt offerings to place deities) as well as the elements routinely deployed by pastoral workers, such as the local authority of *yatiris*, the use of *coca* and alcohol, and the socioritual solidarity of the indigenous community, as metonyms of an authentic shared Aymaraness. As Orta points out, a number of these traits are already politically charged, having been taken up as points of conflict in community-level religious disputes arising from both Protestant and neo-Catholic evangelisation and also, in recent decades, by neotraditionalist political movements (Orta 1998: 169). The Katarista movement, for example, has self-consciously taken up emblems of Andean culture as politicised symbols of its struggle against a state seen as complicit in the destruction, repression and forgetting of indigenous cultures (see Albó 1987, 1994; Harris 1995; Hurtado 1986).

The performance of indigeneity by Morales at Aymara New Year is addressed in the following section, investigating the ways in which the President takes up emblems of Andean culture to garner the support of the people.

### **Aymara New Year at Tiwanaku**

At 4am on the 21<sup>st</sup> June, 2009, I met a group of shoe-shiners from Fundación Nuevo Día at La Ceja and we caught a minibus to Tiwanaku. It was freezing on the altiplano and the bus windows steamed up as the icy air and warm breaths collided. The radio blasted out a mixture of *cumbia* and 80's tunes. Half way to our destination we came to a sudden halt as two buses had crashed metres ahead of us. A thick fog made it impossible to proceed at more than 20mph. It was still pitch dark when we arrived and the cold air stung our faces as we hurried to put on balaclavas and wrap ourselves in blankets. People begin to arrive at about 6pm the night before but *micros* and taxis bring tourists and locals from La Paz and El Alto until early in the morning. The ceremony starts at 1am with music played on the *pututu* and *zampoña* (Andean flutes and pan-pipes) and fireworks and reaches its climax of the Aymara New Year with the 'return of the sun' or '*Wilkakuti*.' The path to the entrance of the ruins was lit by burning torches and, all down the normally quiet streets of the small town that surrounds the ruins of Tiwanaku, vendors were selling *api* (a warm maize drink) and snacks. We had to buy tickets - one price for locals, another for tourists, and queues had formed; we were given wristbands and checked over by security guards. The largest crowd was composed of tourists and young people from La Paz and El Alto. They had brought their own alcohol in backpacks and, as sunrise approached, became increasingly inebriated. With the sun casting it's glow across the surrounding vast, flat expanse, the crowds began to sing and



dance, many with the *wiphala* (flag of indigenous nations) wrapped around their shoulders. For the tourists and the younger generation of Bolivians, this was an excuse for a party and a reason to visit the countryside. In contrast to the young people attending the event, including my companions, the few older attendees from the surrounding countryside stood out from the crowd, both in their dress and in the manner and significance of their celebration. The women were dressed in layered skirts and wrapped in shawls; the men wore red *ponchos* and wide-brimmed hats. They performed their own private *ch'alla* rituals, using alcohol and *coca*, celebrating the Winter Solstice with a reverence which the crowd lacked.

Morales arrived just before sunrise in his private helicopter. He processed to the central precinct, wearing a robe and headdress and raised the *wiphala* to cheers from the crowd. The *wiphala's* presence in Bolivia's social movements predates the current period and its mythic antiquity is part of its power. It has increasingly become the symbol of Bolivian indigeneity since the early 1990s. Before first light, *yatiris* poured their offerings of alcohol on the ground as they chanted "*Jallalla*" (cheers to mother earth) and a llama was sacrificed for good fortune.<sup>46</sup> Morales made an offering to *Pachamama*, with alcohol and *coca*. Called the "millennial" or the "sacred leaf," the chewing of *coca* serves a powerful instrumental purpose in the performative spectacles of protest marches and rallies. Alongside the other symbols of Andean Bolivia, *coca* publicises the indigenous "heritage" of protesters and creates "the people" as distinct from the traditional political class and as an active agent in the current Bolivian reality.<sup>47</sup> We

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<sup>46</sup> The folds of the llama's heart are believed to tell the future.

<sup>47</sup> As an integral part of the culture of the nation (and not just of rural and marginal Indians), efforts to eradicate *coca* fields as part of the U.S. War on Drugs have become the epitomising example of attacks on Bolivian sovereignty, which now include efforts to privatise, tin, water, and most recently, gas. The chewing of *coca* leaf together is also part of the social conviviality that marks group assemblies, from the family to larger kinds of political association (Albro 2005: 4).

stood among the crowd of onlookers, set back a few hundred metres up on a hill, looking down over the town and ruins. As we wandered back to the minibus, stopping for a cup of *api* and a fried breakfast on the way, shouts and pointing from the crowd directed us to look up as Morales' helicopter circled the ancient site and flew away. He had been there barely an hour, performing rites in the centre of Tiwanaku - singing the national anthem, wearing 'traditional' dress, his troops forming a procession through the grounds. It was a gesture by the President to demonstrate solidarity with the Aymara people by joining in this ritual at the same site where he was inaugurated in 2006.

On returning to La Paz, Fernando, a young alteño, keen indigenous activist and student at UPEA, explained the significance of the rituals - *“The solstice ceremony signifies the start of the agricultural year in the countryside but now rituals are modified to fit work and studies.....I am Aymara and take part in Aymara New Year because I feel that the spirit renews itself every 21<sup>st</sup> June and it's amazing to watch the rays of the sun on the first day.”* Although changes have occurred with rural to urban migration, and the agricultural calendar is not so relevant to urban Aymara, many still celebrate the solstice as it is a powerful symbol and ceremony of identity, reminding them of their heritage. However, the young alteños I accompanied to Tiwanaku for Aymara New Year were as unfamiliar with the proceedings as were the tourists. Through the “invented tradition” of Aymara New Year and his participation in the event at Tiwanaku, involving the global symbols of ‘authentic indigeneity,’ including the public performance of the *ch’alla*, Morales strives to consolidate his political orientations.

Invented tradition, while it refers to the past, is in reality a response to current conditions, providing conceptual continuity in the face of adaptations to novel situations

(Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983: 1-2). Reference to the past is not the same as a detailed statement of historical process. The memories embodied in iconographic motifs, for example, are inherently more flexible than is history and are therefore considerably more effective (Rappaport in Dover et al 1992: 216). Rappaport examines the symbols of national identity that have been created by the Paéz and Guambianos of Cauca and the Cumbales of Nariño, Colombia, as the contemporary political innovations building upon existing symbols of ethnic identity (Rappaport 1992). These Southern Colombian national symbols are invented traditions (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983) and responses to Colombian state policy, which dispossesses and marginalises Indians while providing them with some leeway for political action (Rappaport in Dover et al 1992: 203). Writing on '*recuperacion*,' Rappaport explains that the concept means more than reclaiming lands or reconstituting indigenous political authority. *Recuperación* is at once a return to the past and a masking of innovation by reference to history (Hobsbawm 1983). *Recuperación* also encompasses multiple forms of cultural revitalisation. She describes the way in which, among the organisations grouped under the rubric of the Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca, or CRIC (Regional Indian Council of Cauca), the term *recuperación* is used to promote its revival of community ceremony, such as the reinstitution of investiture rituals at sacred lakes, where cabildo staffs of office are sanctified (CRIC 1983). This type of repossession is at once a return to the past and the use of an historical memory within a new and innovative political context. While CRIC has successfully reintroduced the ritual, it is participated in by many more individuals than had traditionally performed the ceremony, it is probably not accompanied by the same strict abstinences, and it is promoted as a political and propagandistic occasion, complete with the taking of photographs for national consumption (Rappaport in Dover et al 1992: 205).

As Rappaport points out, the original intent of Hobsbawm and Ranger was to study the creation of ethnic and national traditions by colonial powers intent upon dominating subject peoples (Rappaport in Dover et al 1992: 203). The symbols of indigeneity used by Morales are, in contrast, representations of resistance to capitalism and globalisation - a returning of power to the people via a President who 'rules by obeying.' Three years since his inauguration at Tiwanaku Morales continues his symbolic reminders of his sympathies with '*el pueblo*' (the people). Despite it being an "invented tradition" (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983),<sup>48</sup> Morales uses this festival to raise his profile among indigenous peoples. Just as at Tiwanaku in the early nineteenth century 'the discourse and practice of archaeology and history were instrumental in the reconstruction of the local and national even as they relied on "fabrication, invention and imagination" for their authentication' (Guha-Thakurta 2004) it may equally be stated that today the indigeneity of Evo Morales relies on fabrication, invention and imagination for its authentication.<sup>49</sup>

The following section investigates the manifestation of a further way of 'being indigenous' in Bolivia today; the re-evaluation of indigenous knowledge currently underway in La Paz and El Alto, specifically as it pertains to the lives of the most marginalised of young *alteños*.

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48 Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) argue that invented tradition is a set of ritual or symbolic practices governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules that seek to inculcate certain behavioural values and norms through repetition, which, in turn, implies continuity with the past.

49 Bolivia-online.net describes the event, "This is one of the largest and most authentic religious celebrations in the Andean world. The central ceremony occurs on every June 21<sup>st</sup> at Tiwanaku at the Kalasasaya temple. This marks the Aymara New Year and is dedicated to sun worship."

## Redefining the “Lettered City”

The concept of the “lettered city” was first discussed by Uruguayan literary critic Angel Rama in *La Ciudad Letrada* (1984), describing the power of literacy in Latin American societies, and the central role of cities in deploying and reproducing it. From the urban headquarters literacy emerges as a benevolent technology of improvement, the historical thrust of which has been to programmatically let Indians die so as to achieve progress. It was also achieved through cultural technologies, via *alfabetización* and *urbanización* (literacy and urbanisation). Through these processes, the death of Indians was actually their birth as *mestizos* and, only as such, citizens of the nation. What from an indigenous viewpoint expresses a denial of ontological difference, the state phrased as progress, protection, and cultural improvement. “Letting Indians die” was not recognised as antagonistic until very recently, when indigenous movements utilising the possibilities of recognition in the terms of the state - namely, rights to cultural difference - transformed the antagonism into a political conflict to be negotiated, and raised claims to a plurinational state (De la Cadena 2010).

Today, rather than “letting Indians die” the government is encouraging a rebirth of the Indian. A common sentiment among young *alteños* is that Morales has brought a new pride and respect to Indian people. Many of my friends explained that they are no longer ashamed to call themselves Indian. It appears that the concept of the “lettered city” is being redefined by young *alteños*, with knowledge no longer radiating from the city but being brought to the city as part of the current re-imagining of indigeneity underway. Indigenous knowledge is today being re-evaluated and given new prominence. Morales has taken steps to increase indigenous education. Only a

generation ago, parents encouraged their children to conceal any knowledge of indigenous language so as to progress in the city. Today, President Morales has introduced a requirement that, in order to work in his government, at least one indigenous language must be spoken alongside Spanish and a resurgence in indigenous language is occurring. Since 2006 Morales has supported a movement to teach indigenous languages such as Aymara, Chipayan, Quechua, and Guarani, which are spoken mainly in the rural areas of Bolivia, in state schools. His government estimates that over sixty percent of the population speaks a native language that predates the introduction of Spanish in the sixteenth century. In 2006 Morales' minister of education and culture, Félix Patzi, issued a letter stating that no school would be recognised unless it guaranteed indigenous language instruction in the 2007 academic year (Reel 2007). This decision has angered many urban Bolivians who see it as a move to replace Spanish but amongst young *alteños* it is an extremely popular decision. Rita Huanca, a twenty-three year old student at UPEA told me *“It’s important to speak the languages because they’re our true languages. I am of the Aymara pueblo.”*

Although it is clearly not considered necessary to speak an indigenous language to be indigenous in El Alto, among the young *alteños* involved in this research, Aymara language is closely associated with being indigenous. They are keen to enhance their knowledge of an indigenous language to extend their claims to indigeneity and therefore also, in the current political context, to modernity. Roxana Huanca, a second generation Aymara-speaking migrant to El Alto, who is twenty six years old and well educated, having attended college and university for five years, stressed the importance of knowing Aymara. Like many of her peers, she learned the language from her parents. According to Roxana, and other young *alteños* at Wayna Tambo, language (Aymara

being mixed with Spanish or lost completely) has been the most significant change between first and third generation migrants. She told me *“We need to speak Aymara to communicate with people who arrive from the provinces and also with older relatives. I value the Aymara language most as part of identity.”* In a similar vein, Hernan Balboa explained the importance of native languages for a preservation of the past and for a reconnection with one’s roots in the city: *“I studied Aymara at school and have very deep Aymara roots. We need to know Aymara and Quechua in the city to understand campesinos who don't speak Spanish and to better understand our past.”* Ruben Carrillo, a hip-hop musician from El Alto, reiterated this argument with the following words: *“It’s important for young people to speak their native languages to promote the process of decolonisation and re-evaluation of our culture and history. It’s fundamental to think in our languages.”*<sup>50</sup>

Evo Morales was raised as a child speaking only Aymara. Due to decades spent in the Chapare region of Cochabamba, his Quechua is more fluent but, like millions of Bolivians, his first language is now Spanish. Numerous qualitative studies have shown that in the twentieth century many indigenous people stopped identifying themselves and stopped being identified as indigenous when they migrated to urban centers (Canessa 2006: 256). One of the diagnostics of change in ethnic identity is language shift and there is no doubt that indigenous languages are giving way to Spanish, especially in urban areas. Although Morales is introducing indigenous language and education, Spanish is still the most spoken language in El Alto. Despite this fact, people increasingly self-identify as indigenous. In El Alto there have always been more people

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50 As is the case with many indigenous languages, the Aymara language with its specific structure has been shown to correlate with basic ideas in culture, behaviour and world view. Extensive research has been conducted into the Aymara language, for example by Hardman, Vasquez and Yapita (1975); Hardman (1978, 1981) and Briggs (1976).

self-identifying as indigenous than elsewhere in the country. Less than half the population today regularly communicates in the languages of Aymara, Quechua and Guaraní, but in the 2001 census some sixty-two percent of respondents identified themselves as 'indigenous', and in the city of El Alto that figure rises to seventy-five percent (Hylton and Thomson 2005: 44). There is every indication that urbanites are changing their habits and large numbers of people are identifying as indigenous even if they do not live in an indigenous community or speak an indigenous language. At least some of these people are individuals who in most contexts would be considered unambiguously white.

In Latin America *indigenismo* was a powerful discourse, particularly in the first half of the twentieth century. *Indigenismo* refers commonly to a reformist movement led by *mestizo* and Creole intellectuals and artists who sought to defend a marginalised Indian population. Indigenistas criticised the abuses of a backward, “feudal” order in the countryside, and their concerns helped to motivate social and agrarian reforms on the part of modernising and populist state governments (Gotkowitz 2011: 161).<sup>51</sup> In discussing the politics of race and indigeneity in relation to discourses on nationalism and the state in Colombia, Wade argues that blacks and indigenous people, or representations of them, 'nourished' elite ideas of the nation; apart from being points of difference against which to define whiteness and progress, their supposed primitive powers were also valued for their own sake (Wade 2001: 862). He describes the way in

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<sup>51</sup> In the heyday of the movement, from the 1920s to the 1960s, *indigenismo* was never as developed as a cultural or political project in Bolivia as it was elsewhere. This tentative development in Bolivian *indigenismo* reflects the fraught relation between liberal elites and the contemporaneous political mobilisation of Aymara communities in the Lake Titicaca and La Paz regions. Some of the most forceful indigenous and “Indianist” movements in late nineteenth-century and twentieth-century Latin America emerged in these regions, beginning with the Zárate Willka mobilisation during the 1899 Federal War and the *cacique-apoderado* movement for indigenous territorial and cultural restoration from the 1910s to the 1930s. “Indianist” in Bolivia is distinguished from “*indigenismo*” insofar as it entails a more radical ethnic agenda and is headed by Indian intellectuals and political leaders, rather than *mestizos* and Creoles (Gotkowitz 2011: 161).



which representations of the Colombian nation depended to some extent on the notion of indigenusness and blackness, even if the future was thought of in terms of progressive mixing and 'whitening.' Blacks and indigenous people, or at least the image of them, were needed as a reference point against which whiteness and the future of whitened modernity could be defined (Wade 2001).<sup>52</sup> By mid-century in Bolivia the *mestizo* was part of the national project of creating an urban, Spanish-speaking middle class as well as a rural proletariat, and consequently the indian was erased in favour of a *mestizo* identity in the 1952 revolution. The educational system was particularly directed to this end (Choque 1992; Canessa 2004). As part of this process indigenous culture was glorified, but as folklore rather than contemporary culture; in order to create a new national identity the state sponsored folklore festivals, encouraged folkloric dances in schools and enabled folklore troupes to tour Latin America. In many of these instances the troupes were exclusively or primarily composed of *mestizo-creoles* (Bigenho 2005).

Canessa distinguishes between 'indigenism' and its cognate, 'indigeneity,' as a contemporary global phenomenon and *indigenismo*, a twentieth century intellectual and artistic movement that sought to valorise indigenous culture. *Indigenismo* was about *mestizaje* more than it was about contemporary indigenous peoples, whereas contemporary indigenism is far more about indigenous people as political and cultural subjects in their own right. This is reflected in the quote below, which is part of a discussion I had with Hortencia Chambi, a young alteño student at UMSA. She told me

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<sup>52</sup> Taussig (1987) has pursued this idea in relation to the healing powers of indigenous people and Wade says he also considered the theme highly relevant to his work on music and national identity, with literate elites writing on music and national identity and thereby remaking difference because it was fundamental to the reproduction of their own position (Wade 2001: 855).

*“Morales is Aymara and later Bolivian because Aymara, Quechua and Guarani are older than Bolivian. Bolivia recently completed two hundred years of life, created by cholo mestizos. He uses his identity, Aymara first and Quechua later, learning from the cocaleros to change the opinions which mestizos and whites have of the Indian. He knows the world of inequality that there’s always been between the mestizo/white and the racism of this country towards the Indian. The president wants to put all at the same level. Now there are various visions of government and not only one as there was before. Although there were various parties all were mestizo.”*

Hortencia’s comments show her belief that Morales is aiming to create greater equality in Bolivia, striving to change the opinions which *mestizo*/whites have of indigenous peoples.

Albro has discussed the ‘multiple ways of being indigenous’ in contemporary Bolivia and the way in which the strength of Morales’ party, the MAS, lies not in its ‘authentically’ indigenous character but rather in the very plurality of the way it represents and reworks what it means to be indigenous. Morales refers to his indigenous roots but he is careful to avoid presenting himself and his party as simply as indigenous party, even as he lays out his programme with regular reference to indigeneity. The rhetoric of MAS is carefully balanced between articulating the rights of workers and expressing an indigenous world-view. The result is a particularly powerful language of political engagement. Canessa writes of Morales’ ‘strategic essentialism’ common to many indigenist activists who wish to accurately represent their supporters whilst articulating a political language that is effective in a wider public domain. MAS’s politics offer something for an extensive range of Bolivians: an inclusive ethnicity; a sense of authenticity; and a powerful critique of globalisation (Canessa 2006: 255).

MAS strategically marries a class discourse with an ethnic one and combines both in a broad anti-globalisation discourse (Canessa 2006: 252). In a December 2003 interview in *Counterpunch*, Morales articulates very clearly this shift from indigenous identity politics to a critique of neoliberalism, capitalism, and the world economic order and a defence of environmental issues:

*“After more than five hundred years, we, the Quechuas and Aymaras, are still the rightful owners of this land. We, the indigenous people, after five hundred years of resistance, are retaking the power. This retaking of power is oriented towards the recovery of our own riches, our own natural resources such as the hydrocarbons. This affects the interests of the transnational corporations and the interests of the neoliberal system. Nevertheless, I am convinced that the power of the people is increasing and strengthening. This power is changing presidents, economic models and politics. We are convinced that capitalism is the enemy of the earth, of humanity and of culture. The US government does not understand our way of life and our philosophy. But we will defend our proposals, our way of life and our demands with the participation of the Bolivian people”* (Dangl 2003).

Morales moves swiftly from identifying himself specifically with 'Quechuas and Aymaras,' then more broadly with 'indigenous people' and finally with the Bolivian people more generally. The language of Morales and MAS is inclusive and indigenous interests, constructed as plural, popular, communal and explicitly anti-neoliberal, have moved to the political mainstream. Rather than seeking to supplant the nation-state, their rhetoric is about defending Bolivia from the forces of globalisation by making indigenous concerns national concerns. As Albro notes, 'In a country where the majority shares an indigenous heritage, indigenous-based politics have lately gained

national ground not through promoting ethno-nationalist separatism but by ceding the formerly exclusive category of 'Indian' to a pluralist and urban-based project of refounding the Bolivian state' (Albro 2006a: 433-434). In this sense, indigenous identity is no longer confined to the rural, the 'traditional,' and the internal Other.

### **Morales as Role Model**

The lettered quality of politics, shaped by the role of the city and its intellectual legacy, has meant that the better educated rank higher in the scale of politics; the exceptions - those who do not have a university degree, like President Morales - are regarded as anomalies (De La Cadena 2010: 359). Today, many middle and upper class Bolivians consider Garcia Linera, Bolivia's vice-president, to be the grey matter behind the President and find it difficult to respect Morales due to his lack of formal education. (De La Cadena 2010: 359). However, this same lack adds to the appeal of Morales among marginalised young *alteños*, many of whom have had to drop out of school or university to make money working to support their families. Dunkerley suggests that Morales, who won his popularity not because he was outstanding but precisely because he was representative of 'normality,' can achieve charismatic status through 'charismatic acts' (Dunkerley 2007a: 43). He has cut his salary, abstained from alcohol, worked absurdly long hours, and shared the presidential residence with members of his cabinet. These acts are appreciated by young *alteños* and it would appear that, among a large proportion of this group, Morales actually has achieved charismatic status. They identify with particular aspects of his life, such as the fact that he had an impoverished, difficult upbringing, and view the fact that he worked to become leader of the *cocaleros*

and then President as a sign that they too can work themselves out of poverty. These young alteños do not find it difficult to empathise with the challenges Morales has overcome to reach the status of President.

For instance, a number of young alteños, all in their early twenties and participating in a group discussing the influence of the President, expressed similar views: Hernán Mamani, a student at UPEA, said *“Morales lived in the country like all Aymaras and he's a man who fights for all to have the opportunity to study and work, opportunities that he did not have....There was discrimination before, towards Morales, for being an Indian, but now I think there is more respect among everyone.”* Veronica Murillo, also of UPEA, responded *“Morales has taken our identity to show the people we aren't ashamed of it. He's given voice to those who couldn't speak. There is less discrimination now we have an Aymara president.”*

Alejandro Sullcamamani, a young shoe-shiner, told me

*“The aim of youth activism is union to fight to preserve Bolivian culture and to keep the community.....I am Aymara and identify as Indian for my race. When I'm with my people I feel at home..... El Alto has progressed a lot with the ex-alcalde Pepe Lucho Paredes and the fight of the people. Aymara can be used to give the true history, not the contemporary which gives false hopes to humanity. Morales is Aymara and his thoughts are according to the ancestors.”*

Juan Segales, who works at Wayna Tambo, said *“President Evo is of Quechua descent. Young people should be involved to continue his fights. Aymara and Quechua organisation was much more advanced than ours and those people were more*

*respectful. Morales has his people as leader but he has an indigenous logic.*” Some of my friends described Morales as Aymara, others as Quechua, and sometimes Quechua and Aymara would be used interchangeably when talking about the identity of the President. It appears that it is not so important to distinguish to which group he belongs. Rather, significance is placed on the fact of his indigeneity more generally. A common source or at least a contributing factor to Morales' indigenous identity was often declared to be his rural origins. Alfredo Catari lives in Rio Seco with his parents and told me that he hopes one day to have the opportunity to attend university and, eventually, to be a professional. He expressed his opinion on Morales and on his own identity: *“The President of the Republic is from the countryside and is very good with the poor and helps many. He’s a campesino and not ashamed. We are Indian races and I am Aymara at heart.”*

In the same group discussion I asked about the changes which Morales has brought to El Alto. All of the responses demonstrate a commitment to the future of both their city and country. Roxana Huanca said, *“Youth need to be involved to make changes for the future.”* She acknowledged the positive changes already achieved by Morales, adding, *“There are the bonuses for old and young people, nationalisation, the new CPE and less corruption.”* Hernán Mamani adopted a similar stance - *“Youth need to be involved in politics to understand the failings in the administration of our country. Progress will take a little longer but there are signs of improvement and more opportunities because there are scholarships and training for young people who finish their Bachelors.”* The changes described by these young alteños were all considered to be positive, signs of progress. For many, the most positive changes have come in the form of greater equality for indigenous people. As Alejandro Sullcamamani described,

*“The discrimination today isn’t so bad; we can work and study and take part in public affairs. There is more social equality from this government, more preference for the poor classes, Aymaras and Quechuas.”*

## **Opposition and the Creation of Other Structures**

Prior to Morales, indigenous and *campesino* peoples benefited from many of Goni’s reforms, which simultaneously turned them against the dominant neoliberal political and economic order. As noted by Postero (2007: 17), “indigenous citizens in Bolivia have taken advantage of political openings that the LPP offered, in many cases by assuming many of the rationalities of neoliberalism. In an interesting turnaround, however....these indigenous citizens are using them to pose important challenges to the working of global capitalism.”<sup>53</sup> For instance, municipalisation under the LPP created decentralised electoral bases for the election of MAS officials in Cochabamba, Oruro and La Paz, while reforms in national electoral laws allowed indigenous and *campesino* candidates from social movements and non-traditional political parties to enter Congress for the first time in 2002.

MAS and the broader movement of which it is a part cannot be understood in terms of indigenous identity alone. Since at least 2002, indigenous representation and leadership in public affairs appears to be broadly (though not universally) accepted by Bolivian people (Dunkerley 2007b). In contrast to indigenous politics in many parts of Latin America and elsewhere, rooted in claims of autonomy for a unitary subject position,

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<sup>53</sup> See Unterhalter’s ideas about education in South Africa. While education was racialised under apartheid, it paradoxically provided a space for the formation of political consciousness and mobilisation (Unterhalter 2000).

MAS represents a plural, popular-movement in which indigeneity, though central, is but one constitutive element. For many, Morales is seen as a group of emerging “populist” leaders in South America,<sup>54</sup> but this left is not homogeneous. The IMF itself has praised his macroeconomic policy for its prudence, and his social policies can be compared without any difficulty to those of the “moderate” Lula de Silva or his successor Dilma Rousseff in Brazil (Stefanoni 2011). Whilst the majority of Bolivians are indigenous (64% acc. to the 2001 census), a fierce desire for inclusive modernisation emerges forcefully from deep within the Bolivian population. Morales reactivates developmental imaginaries in which “living well” in terms of material welfare is more powerful than any spiritual or non-materialist guidelines allegedly inscribed in indigenous cosmovisions.

Canessa asks whether, since *indigenismo* was accompanied by a strong impulse to assimilate indians, indigenism has the potential to assimilate *mestizos* (Canessa 2006: 25). Recent political events in Bolivia suggest that the answer is no, it does not. A powerful countermovement has emerged among agroindustrial elites in Santa Cruz and the Eastern region of the country, which poses a real threat to indigenous populist movements and the larger MAS project. Fabricant (2009) describes the way in which the Union Juvenil Cruceñista (UJC) imposes an imagined order on both regional and national space by intimidating, threatening and publicly assaulting Andean migrants. The UJC is a militant, neofascist group founded in Santa Cruz in 1957 as an arm of the Civic Committee. The group has become the subject of controversy and accusations concerning its activities in support of the Santa Cruz autonomy movement and opposing

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<sup>54</sup> Including Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, his Ecuadorian colleague Rafael Correa, the late Nestor Kirchner and his widow, current Argentine president Cristina Fernandez, and the Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega.



the government of Morales and the MAS. Claiming a membership of more than 2,000, the UJC has violently enforced general civic strikes called for by the Civic Committee, intimidated and assaulted leftist political opponents, and recently served as a “private” security force patrolling and protecting the city of Santa Cruz. De la Cadena (2010) captures recent opposition to Morales by drawing attention to commentary in a local newspaper article:

*The government of MAS, all of it, its ministers, representatives to the parliament and to the constitutional assembly, talk like mummies.....its wise men cut llamas' throat, burn coca, and they burn sacred fire in the central room of the Governmental Palace. Then, when all is silence, and only the sound of the pututu (conch horn) is heard, they make their rituals to their gods, for Evo Morales to become immortal. [Manfredo Kempff Suárez, La Razón (La Paz), October 2, 2007]*

Some of this opposition and discontent has also emerged among young alteños. Jose Herbes, who is studying electronics and telecommunications at UMSA commented,

*“We can't live in the past and it's not important for children to know their roots. El Alto lives in the past and wants to relive it but the rest of the country, the East, is on the way to progress, moving forwards. Morales is Bolivian with Aymara roots and Aymara thoughts. He wants to go back to everything before and be indigenous. Youth shouldn't be involved in politics. They're manipulated, for example by the Union Juvenil Crucenista of the Media Luna – Santa Cruz, Pando and Beni.”*

Morales' government is sometimes viewed with distrust, being associated with greed and nepotism. In a discussion at Wayna Tambo, the rapper Juan Segales told me *“It doesn't interest me to be involved in politics - I wish there was a clean politics but some people study to get into politics and then rob. Many youths do not like politics because it pollutes their personalities. Everyone looks for personal benefits because first they think of themselves and then later the people.”*

Morales' administration mobilised discourses and performances of Andean culture to reorder or cleanse Bolivian society of the colonial legacy of racism and the more contemporary evils of capitalism and neoliberalism (Postero 2007). Yet foundational to the growth and development of right-wing politics in Santa Cruz has been right-wing re-appropriation of such performative strategies of the Left. Fabricant (2009) traces the logic of a series of performances, spectacles of both shared cultural - ethnic identity and paramilitary violence, to illustrate how Cambas (anyone born in the lowland zone and, though originally a term used only for Indians, now applies to elites of Santa Cruz) build a base of support and inculcate right-wing ideology, which stands in opposition to the leftist highland Indian. Although right-wing politicians historically vilified traditional indigenous communities as savage and anti - modern, civic committee leaders, along with the UJC, now make use of Guaraní culture in their civic festivals and parades to forge a shared ethnic identity. In part, this use has much to do with Morales' highly successful manipulation of highland indigenous culture in his rise to the presidency. However, whereas Morales appropriated the symbolism of Aymara identity to decolonise the nation-state, Cambas have sought to use the same strategy to launch their conservative autonomy campaign. As Bolivians of European origin they are obviously unable to show a genuinely indigenous face, so they have constructed a

hybrid identity mixing Cruceño and Guaraní Indian using a skillfully manufactured shared past and contemporary narrative of resistance out of what is actually a history of white supremacy and exploitation (Fabricant 2009: 772). Like Peruvian elites of the nineteenth century (De la Cadena 2000), these Cruceños use folk performances to claim national and regional identities. In the Camba case, these performances use the image of the lowland Indian to assert a claim to regional autonomy.

Furthermore, there is a certain amount of apathy towards Morales and his government. This is not to say that attitudes are apathetic in general, but rather that many young alteños consider the answers to their urban struggles to be found in their rural ancestral past rather than with the present government. Ruben Carrillo is a rapper at Wayna Tambo and a student at UMSA:

*“Aymara alludes to a history, a way of life that historically has been able to spread, with its particularities; another form of civilisation different from today. The Gas War of October 2003 opened a moment of tension for the alteño youth and brought the chance to shape a new type of country. The process that has been initiated in the city of El Alto is deep, in the sense that it wouldn’t be looking for demands of inclusion but rather the creation of other structures.”*

Abraham Bojorquez, who brought hip-hop to El Alto, told me

*“I learned a lot at home because my family still carries this cultural identity and transmitted the history of the pueblos originarios. This cultural vision can propose another form of politic, more solid, with the people and with nature. Before we had powers and energies, which gave the Andean*

*cosmovision... We are confused with living better and with globalisation.  
The pueblos live well; Aymara identity can confront consumer, capitalist  
globalisation.”*

## **Conclusion**

For Evo Morales and the MAS indigeneity is not limited to the rural, territorially bound, ethnic 'other,' but rather serves an articulatory role, linking ethnicity and class, rural and urban (Albro 2006a, 2006b; Postero 2007). If we accept that indigenous identity is socially constructed, we must also accept the possibility that understandings of indigeneity may be reconstructed. This is not to say that indigenous peoples can escape history and geography. Rather, it is to argue that indigenous peoples, and the societies within which they live, need not be limited to particular histories or geographies, and that new forms of transcendent, coalitional politics are possible.<sup>55</sup> Morales has acted - and indeed continues to act - as a catalyst in the revival and re-imagining of indigeneity in Bolivia and this is a vital process in the empowerment of the most marginalised of young *alteños*. Morales promotes conditions to accept Indians (e.g. to articulate their demands with the vocabulary of gender, ethnic, economic, territorial, or environmental struggle) and, wielding these concepts, “Indians” can get recognition and access to resources.

The young generation of *alteños* is imagining an alternative future based on indigenous knowledge, re-defining the “lettered city,” with knowledge coming into rather than going out of the city, now from Indian to *mestizo* - being adapted to the urban

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<sup>55</sup> Such coalitions have played a crucial role in the ability of Bolivian social movements to limit the power of transnational firms to capture profits from gas exploitation, for example.

environment and the current political context. Morales and MAS have their supporters and opponents and in El Alto young people are taking what is useful but they are in charge. For the younger generation who travelled from La Paz to Tiwanaku to watch the sun rise, the main motivation was the party atmosphere and to show solidarity with President Morales, whereas for the rural Aymara, they continued their traditions as they had before the Aymara New Year was invented, made into a public holiday and a tourist event. For rural people it is still about a ritual to *Pachamama*, the Winter Solstice, the agricultural calendar. Aymara New Year is an “invented tradition,” an example of the use of globalised concepts of indigeneity by Morales and MAS.

Whereas Morales uses indigeneity for political purposes, politicising culture and inventing traditions such as Aymara New Year, young *alteños* are re-evaluating and recuperating values, beliefs and practices passed down from the older generations. These traditions never disappeared but the government of Morales has encouraged young people to have pride in their language and culture. They are re-imagining indigeneity and contesting their marginalised status in their own ways in the city through practices of “living tradition” such as the *ch'alla*, participation in festivals, and the maintenance of contact with *el pueblo* (the village/the people). These ways of 'being indigenous' will be discussed in the following chapter.



Fig. 12: A local *campesino* (centre, dressed in a red poncho and wide-brimmed hat) makes an offering to the surrounding countryside



Fig. 13: Crowds raise their hands to the sun as it rises. Two local women, in the foreground, make their own private offering of a *ch'alla* to *Pachamama* and *Inti*





**Fig. 14: Crowds gather to celebrate the Aymara New Year, waving the *wiphala*, the flag of indigenous nations**



**Fig. 15: Locals and tourists look on as Morales performs rituals to *Pachamama* in the main precinct of Tiwanaku. The Kalasasaya, Gate of the Sun, can be seen to the left.**

## Chapter IV

### **“Living Tradition” and a New Narrativization of the Earth**

*'Our duration' is not merely one instant replacing another; if it were, there would never be anything but present – no prolonging of the past in the actual.....Duration is the continuous progress of the past which gnaws into the future and which swells as it advances'*

(Henri Bergson 1911: 4-5).

*'We are sons of indigenous Aymaras; we must speak and not have shame. Rituals and ceremonies cannot disappear because they are part of us; they make us close to our beliefs and the mythological world of our cultures.'*

(Tony Colque, twenty-two, is a hip-hop artist at Wayna Tambo)

This chapter explores the ways in which young *alteños* are making the past relevant to the present; the ways in which they are re-imagining indigeneity in order to claim the modern by performing certain rituals, participating in festivals and maintaining links to *el pueblo* – the natal village of their parents or grandparents. Young *alteños* are exposed to the influences of both their parental roots and new models offered by the city through, for example, increasing exposure to global media and modern consumption practices. Creating community in the name of tradition can be a shared search for an answer to the question of who they are and where they are going; which values and models to choose. Rather than encouraging dichotomies between traditional and modern, I follow the idea of “living tradition” (Gadamer 1975 and Macintyre 1985), which emphasises the inherent debatability of the past (Appadurai 1981). The concept of “living tradition” refuses the absolute dichotomised understanding of the opposition



between continuity and change and asserts that change is grounded in continuities. According to Gadamer, it is the understanding or ‘standing in history’ which characterises the ontological condition of the human species (Gadamer 1975: 245). He claims that the historicity of humanity’s being in the world is manifested through tradition, which requires active appropriation, perpetuation, and transformation by human co-subjects. As stated by Harvey, regarding Andean perspectives on history, the past is seen to coexist in the present and thus can be brought out and actualised in particular ritual circumstances (Harvey 1987).<sup>56</sup>

The creation of networks of solidarity through shared rural links and indigenous practices enables these young people to challenge their marginalised status. They do so by making a claim to urban space previously designated for *mestizos* through their own particular celebration of certain festivals. As Guss, writing on the ‘festive state’ of Venezuela, comments, festive forms are viewed not as static “authoritative texts” but rather as unique performances responding to contemporary historical and social realities (Guss 2000: 23). In contrast to the older generations, these young *alteños* are, for example, conducting the *ch’alla*, a ritual offering to *Pachamama*, more openly in the city. As rituals of marked tradition, *ch’allas* are decisive contexts where the recognisable shape of contemporary native identity is publicly and plausibly defined, disputed, debated, and redefined (Albro 2001b: 58). Practices previously considered traditional and therefore reserved for indigenous populations, such as the chewing of the *coca* leaf, are becoming trendy in bars in Sopocachi, down town La Paz. Similarly, the

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56 Contrasting this notion of time with Hispanic versions, Harris (2000) has argued that they represent two different kinds of history related to different sources of power. In the Hispanic version of history – that is, the history of the modern nation-state – the traditional is displaced by the modern. In the alternative type of history, the distinction between the Hispanic and the non-Hispanic is understood in terms of religious periodisation, or a kind of history characterised by continuity and the enduring understanding of alternative sources of power. Different parts of history may thus coexist and interact through an interchange that is reflected in the possible return of ancestral powers.

*ch'alla*, a custom with Andean roots, has been widely accepted by other social and ethnic groups in La Paz, spreading to non-Aymara sectors of the population. Connerton uses a narrative of loss to describe modernity; ‘What is being forgotten in modernity is profound, the human-scale-ness of life, the experience of living and working in a world of social relationships that are known. There is some kind of deep transformation in what might be described as the meanings of life based on shared memories, and that meaning is eroded by a structural transformation in the life-spaces of modernity’ (Connerton 2009). In contrast to suggestions by Connerton that “modernity forgets,” this chapter demonstrates the ways in which *alteño* youth are remembering and re-imagining, making rural customs relevant to urban life today.

Firstly, this chapter analyses the celebration of the festivals of *Todos Santos*, *Alasitas* and *Carnival* by young *alteños*, discussing continuity and change between rural and urban environments and the creativity they use to make these events relevant to their lives today. There is much change between the significance of these festivals to older generations and young *alteños* in terms of modern consumption practices, aspirations, and imaginings of the future. I argue that there is creativity even and especially in the maintenance of an established tradition. The continuity of tradition is due not to its passive inertia but to its active regeneration – in the tasks of *carrying on* (Hallam and Ingold 2007: 5). In contrast to Aymara New Year, which, as described in the previous chapter, is an “invented tradition,” the rituals and festivals analysed in this chapter all have a long history in the rural Andes (Bastien 1978; Allen 1988; Abercrombie 1998; Harris 2000). I argue that marginalised young *alteños*, through the maintenance of rural connections and the continuing significance of rural knowledge, values and practices, create a strong community in the city.

Secondly, this chapter explores the extent to which young *alteños* maintain contact with the natal village of their parents and grandparents and the significance of this connection to their daily lives in the city. Indigenous beliefs were suppressed under previous leadership but they never lost their power.<sup>57</sup> Orlove (1998) writes of a “narrativization of the earth” whereby rural indicators of earthiness – sandals, adobe, clay pots, fertility rituals – become emblems of virtue in one context but stigmas in another. Once in the city, he says, the proximity to the earth is not only left behind but strongly discouraged. What was spiritual and positive is now backward and unhygienic. Whereas previously, leaving the countryside for the city involved Indians trading their indigenous identity for that of *mestizo*, which was associated with both the nation and progress (Orlove 1998), today, for many Bolivians, ‘the indigenous’ is associated with the nation and progress. This chapter proposes that a new narrativization of the earth is being produced by young *alteños* as they engage in practices of “living tradition.”

The expansion of traditional forms of expressive behavior under the pressures of modernisation in Latin America has been a subject of intrigue to certain scholars. Canclini's preoccupation with the subject began with a recognition that such forms, whether artisanal or festive, were consistently defined “in opposition to modernity” and hence were incompatible with the economic forms of organisation it imposes (1988: 484). However, evidence demonstrates that traditional production did not collapse in the face of widespread social and economic change but inserted itself in into new market and communication systems (Guss 2000: 5). While Canclini offers various market-inspired explanations for this seemingly contradictory phenomenon, he nevertheless insists that it is not a one-way street but rather a space of contestation in which local and

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<sup>57</sup> For a comparative analysis of post-Soviet Russia and Mongolia see Humphrey and Thomas (1994) and Humphrey with Onon (1996).

global continue to struggle for dominance (Canclini 1988: 486; 1993: 45). His analysis undermines the Western preoccupation with issues of authenticity and tradition, preferring instead to see them as part of a continually changing interplay of political, economic, and historical forces. As Clifford writes:

New dimensions of authenticity (cultural, personal, artistic) are making themselves felt, definitions no longer centered on a salvaged past. Rather, authenticity is reconceived as hybrid, creative activity in a local present-becoming-future. Non-western cultural and artistic works are implicated by an interconnected world cultural system without necessarily being swamped by it. Local structures produce histories rather than simply yielding to *History* (Clifford 1987: 126).

In Latin America, various scholars have addressed this particular process of modernisation, in which the traditional or popular has not been eliminated but rather reformulated into new social and structural relations. A “re-articulation of tradition” (Yúdice 1992: 18) has certainly been observed, in which expressive forms once thought to be limited to small rural, subsistence communities are both adapting and thriving in radically different circumstances.

### **Alasitas, Todos Santos and Carnival: Continuity, Creativity, Change**

As Odegard, who conducted fieldwork with rural migrants in Arequipa, Peru, points out, the powers of the past are rediscovered in the urban context. She describes the way in which the reciprocal consumption of food and drink at social gatherings and work

parties (*faenas*) also involves offerings of alcohol to the natural spirits, and thus reflects the relationship between kinship and land, previously to be found in the rural *ayllu*,<sup>58</sup> in an urban context (Odegard 2011: 343). This (re-)creation of the relationship between people and surroundings may be considered one way in which marginalised young *alteños* are making the city their own through the practice of indigenous traditions in the street. The revival of the memory of rural ancestors serves to create a sense of belonging and collectivity.

In the rural Andes, people's communication with the animated landscape is primarily connected to agricultural activities and cycles, and actualised through ritual offerings: for example, to *Pachamama* (Mother Earth) and the *apus* (mountain gods).<sup>59</sup> People negotiate their spatial situatedness through reciprocal means that they see as central for the fertility of the land and animals as well as the well-being of the community (Harris 2000).<sup>60</sup> The ritual of the *ch'alla* is common before cultivating the earth, fishing, hunting or constructing a house. In order to secure their goodwill and thus the fertility of the fields and flocks, these natural spirits are paid through the offering of food, alcohol, *coca* or herbs (Lund Skar 1994: 173-174). Through the *ch'alla* people are in a relationship of interdependence with the natural environment and the spirits that live there.<sup>61</sup> In El Alto the *ch'alla* is widely practiced and, sitting in almost any bar, *alteños* -

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58 Gose (1994) sees the *ayllu* as a flexible social institution, and underlines how it primarily works as a land-holding group that comes to be equivalent to a work group (see also Allen 1988). The *ayllu* can thus be seen to draw together the significance of kin, land, and the spiritual bonds between them (Lund Skar 1994).

59 *Pachamama* is the feminine principle of fertility, life, growth, *ayllus* and society (Bastien 1992: 155), able to give or withhold the rains and the harvests. *Apus* are mountain gods, often seen as the incarnations of ancestors and generally regarded as a masculine principle.

60 The peasants dedicate offerings to *Pachamama* at the start of the agricultural cycle when they bring fallow land under cultivation, and then again at sowing time. *Pachamama* is asked to make the fields give fruit and to prevent the tubers from rotting. Where there are irrigation canals to be cleaned the peasants hold major feasts and ask permission of the *Pachamama* to cut into her surface in order for the fertilising water to flow (Isbell 1977).

61 *Ch'allas* may include covering the earth with flower petals and burying a pot with cooked potatoes,

of any generation - will, before drinking, tip their glass or bottle to let some liquid spill on the floor, or alternatively dip the tip of their index finger into the glass and then flick the liquid away. The action is occasionally accompanied by a mumbled prayer to *Pachamama*. In both rural and urban contexts, it is often part of all life-stage rituals, fiestas for Catholic patron saints, official inaugurations, at la *posesión* (where responsibility is handed over to a new board), on the occasion of inaugurating a new project or when a large investment has been made.

One way in which young alteños remember the pastoral, maintaining links to the rural and to older generations, is through the practice of the *ch'alla*. This ritual also serves to firmly locate them in the city; it is an example of “living tradition” in which change is grounded in continuity. Through performing the *ch'alla* they are remembering and embodying their cultural heritage. The *ch'alla* acts as a memory device; a ‘bridging practice’ that maintains a local implicit knowledge. This shared way of sensing places through memory is an expression of and metaphor for establishing a sense of continuity and identity. *Pachamama* encompasses a generalised idea of the earth or ground, implying that its powers are not necessarily place-specific but may be at work anywhere. Whereas in the countryside the *ch'alla* is carried out with *chicha*, an alcohol brewed from corn and considered to unify man and earth, pure alcohol or *singani* is more often used by my alteño friends. Creativity and improvisation are employed in the

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cigarettes, *coca* leaves and alcohol to feed *Pachamama*. Anthropologists have previously commented on the role of alcohol in the practice of the *ch'alla*. “*Pachamama*, Mother Earth, is always toasted before any Andean drinks” (Bastien 1978:197). The noun '*ch'alla*' is originally Aymara, although it has been hispanised to create the verb '*challar*;' to bless. Andrew Orta (1998) has studied the *ch'alla* in Aymara-speaking Jesus de Machaca and draws interesting relations between libations, memory and personhood. He argues that *ch'alla* are ritual acts of memory that help to align a ‘remembered subject’ (in this case, a person’s ‘*chuyma*’ (Aymara: heart) with the shifting social and material world. Discussions of Aymara memory forms have often focused on so-called drinking paths effected through *ch'allas* (Abercrombie 1986, 1998; Arnold 1992). Comparative research on ritual libations in Bolivia has emphasised their role in maintaining a local historical consciousness by relating the past to the present through the management of genealogical ‘paths of memory’ (Arnold 1992).

city as young *alteños* respond to life's contingencies (Bruner 1993: 326). They put their own slant on indigenous practices in order to achieve their modern ambitions but practices remain fundamentally stable in terms of the continued significance of maintaining reciprocal relations with *Pachamama*.

The following section explores the significance of three different festivals, which have been brought from the countryside to the city, to marginalised young *alteños*. It focuses upon processes of creativity and demonstrates the ways in which participation in such festivals also serves to form bonds between generations.

### **Alasitas**

In Aymara, *Alasitas* means 'buy from me.' In pre-colonial times, when the Aymara god *Ekeko* (also known as *Thunupa*) became known as the god of abundance and prosperity,<sup>62</sup> the festival was celebrated in September to ensure a good crop. *Alasitas* gained recognition in colonial society from 1782 onwards, the year in which the festival's official day of celebration was first established and the date moved from September to January. The custom has since been taken out of its Aymara based context and slowly transferred to other religious festivities in the Bolivian highlands and even to fiestas outside of Bolivia, such as Peru (Arnillas 1996). Since colonisation the festival has contained elements of both Catholicism and traditional Andean beliefs and rituals.

On 24<sup>th</sup> January, 2008, I accompanied a group of shoe-shiners from Fundación Nuevo

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<sup>62</sup> The name *Ekeko* comes from the alteration of the original term *Ekhako* or *Eqaqo*, popularized as *Ekhekho*, who was the ancient god of fortune and prosperity in the Collasuyu (the southeastern region of the Inca empire, which became Bolivia).

Día to participate in *Alasitas*.<sup>63</sup> The blessings took place around noon, in the streets of the zone Miraflores, which was crammed with locals, paceño and alteño, hurrying to buy miniature replicas. The boys selected the figurines of a German Shepherd and a truck along with passports, euros, land, a country house made of ceramic, and I got a Bolivian residence permit. To be successful we not only had to collect these small items but, most crucially, find a *yatiri* to conduct a *ch'alla*. After some effort we found a suitable one. The first was wearing very white running shoes and tracksuit bottoms; the boys were not impressed and wanted to look for a more authentic one – or at least a more authentic-looking one, with a *poncho* and *chullo*. We placed our goods on the side of the street and put a coin in the palms of each of our hands. The *yatiri* asked our names and poured a homemade wine onto the coins. As he mumbled in Aymara, asking for success and that we would not argue amongst ourselves, he tore up a colourful thread and placed the pieces in each of our hands.<sup>64</sup>

*Alasitas* is celebrated by indigenous and *mestizo* Bolivians and whilst the main divinity is *Ekeko*, Catholic priests also give their blessing to the newly acquired miniature goods, simultaneously honouring the Virgin of La Paz. People decide whether to have the miniature purchases blessed by a priest or a *yatiri* (an Aymara spiritual healer). A shoeshiner, Efrain Chipana, told me “*The tradition of Alasitas has changed from how they do it in the country. They used to make offerings more to nature but now it works like the Catholic religion.*” As Abercrombie describes, like all *Alasitas* goods, *Ekeko* must first be doubly blessed in the La Paz basilica by a priest at a special mass in honour of Our Lady of Peace, and outside, on the church steps, by one of the *curanderos* who wait

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63 The festival is held on different dates in different towns but the largest is in La Paz on the 24<sup>th</sup> January.

64 See Allen on miniatures In Howard-Malverde (1997).



with ready charcoal braziers, ritual arrays, and libations to enliven *Ekeko's* latent powers (Abercrombie 1998: 37).

*Ekeko* is traditionally depicted as a man with a moustache, wearing Andean clothes (especially the *poncho*) and loaded with bags and baskets with grain and food. *Ekeko* may seem a comic and folkloric figure, but his name betrays profound associations with the past: that of a god of ancient highland myths, a trickster who brought forth the peoples of the Bolivian high plains in his travels southwards from Tiwanaku (Abercrombie 1998: 37). In spite of these deep ancestral connections, during recent decades, the miniature objects have changed from purely rural products, such as potatoes and animals, to commercial urban products. The offerings parallel the transformation in society from an agricultural to a commercialised urban society and the *alasitas* have expanded greatly as a result of increased migration to the city. Today, people buy toy cars, false money, models of houses, household items, food, computers, construction materials, mobile phones, houses, cars, university degrees and even figures of domestic workers, if they want to employ one the following year (Cáceres Terceros 2002; Circosta 2009). Bolivians buy items which symbolise their material aspirations, their desires for the future. In Bolivia, bolivianos are used for the daily expenses of food, clothes, and small items. Dollars are used for expensive articles, such as cars, houses, televisions and sometimes rent. Although the euro is not used for real payment in society, miniature euros have also entered the miniature market. As the euro is strong compared to the dollar and brings about associations with emigration to Europe, a bundle of miniature European bank notes have become the most purchased item (Derks 2009: 96). Besides money, miniature credit cards of different companies, certificates for bank accounts and lottery tickets can be purchased (Derks 2009: 97).

The aim of *Alasitas* is to achieve wealth and prosperity, nothing to do with a successful harvest but in modern urban terms of commodity. However, the process of *ch'alla* is the same and signifies an adaptation to urban life. As described by Odegaard, rural migrants associate notions of prosperity and progress with a 'modernity' found in cities, and on the other hand they see prosperity as dependent on and influenced by the powers of the past and the surroundings. Different sources of power and prosperity are therefore seen to coexist in the urban landscape, and in people's quest for progress they appeal also to ancient powers (Odegaard 2011: 351). The offerings made in the city are not necessarily defined by an agricultural calendar, nor are they intended to increase the fertility of agricultural land as such, but rather to stimulate other forms of prosperity, well-being, and luck, or what could be conceptualised as fertility in more general terms. Harris (2000) argues that in the rural Andes, the performance of ritual payments is informed by general notions of fertility that are associated not only with production and reproduction, but also with fertility as created and maintained through a logic of reciprocity, circulation, and exchange. In this view, *Pachamama* and the mountains are understood as guardians not only of the fertility of fields and stock – as well as of the mines – but also of the fertility of business and money (Harvey 2001). So, while the intentions behind the payments may vary, they are based on the same cosmological and ontological understanding of exchange as necessary to maintain fertility: that is, the fertility of agriculture as well as money.

Odegaard describes the way in which, in Arequipa, Peru, people involved in trade or other forms of self-employment are more likely to take part in such practices outside the household than are people employed in factory work or as servants. She says that people involved in trading are particularly concerned with making ritual payments to improve

and secure their business (Odegaard 2008). Ritual activity and labour in the Andes must be seen as intimately connected (Harvey 2001), and people's involvement in ritual practices may vary with context as well as with life situation. Considering the various festivals and rituals in which young alteños participate, *Alasitas* is particularly popular. Amongst the friends I spoke to, most agreed that participation in the event, selecting the relevant miniatures and making a *ch'alla* to *Ekeko*, was important for their success that year, be it in business, at school or university or at home, bringing fortune to family. This bringing up to date by '*carrying on*' (Hallam and Ingold 2007: 5) - the making the past relevant in the present through processes of "living tradition" - demonstrates the dissolution of the traditional/modern dichotomy in this context and also reflects the future-oriented attitude of participants, including marginalised young alteños.

Below, I focus upon the significance of the celebration of *Todos Santos* to these young people. Whereas they enthusiastically participate in *Alasitas*, *Todos Santos* is less familiar to this generation. They take part for the sake of their parents rather than their own motivations.

### **Todos Santos**

Festivities for *Todos Santos* start on the 1st November at noon, when the gates of heaven are open so that the dead may return to earth, where they will remain until midday of the 2<sup>nd</sup> November. The actual feast of *Todos Santos* (All Saints) takes place on the 2<sup>nd</sup> November, at the end of the agricultural year. This is the time when the land must rest having provided its fruits, which are later harvested. In pre-colonial tradition, when a person dies, his soul (*nuna*), will meet with the *Urkhu Pacha*, the world below.

In this underground world, a world upside down, souls live the life cycle upside down; they are born old to die young and live again in the world of the living. Death, then, is no break, but a stage in the life cycle, unlike the linear view of life in the Christian religion. Each year, the souls return to visit the world of the living to see if their memory lives on. Today, the ritual is a complex example of syncretism between pre-colonial tradition and Christian tradition imported by the Spanish.

At noon on the 2<sup>nd</sup> November, the ritual begins to send the souls back to the underworld. This act demonstrates the importance of reciprocity; in the countryside the living feed the dead and the dead in November intervene to allow good crops, with the rains beginning in mid-November (Harris 2000).<sup>65</sup> During *Todos Santos* the memory of the dead is cultivated and their graves are decorated with flowers. In La Paz, bodies of the deceased are cremated and families buy or rent glass-fronted spaces for the ashes of their relatives in the walls of the General Cemetery. Each wall has hundreds of these doors and some walls have expanded so far upwards that they resemble apartment blocks. The cemetery is a busy place, with many visitors to the graves which range from huge family mausoleums to common graves of soldiers killed in battle and sections dedicated to mine worker and their families. The remains of the relatives of young *alteños* are also to be found here.

I went to the festival of *Todos Santos* on the 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2008 with Felix from FND and the brothers, Abraham and Victor. Folk musicians from Oruro, La Paz and Potosí

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<sup>65</sup> For a detailed description of the celebration of *Todos Santos* among the Laymi of Northern Potosí see Harris (2000).

lined the steep streets, the '*laderas*'<sup>66</sup> leading up from La Paz to El Alto. Families and friends of the deceased had prepared tables covered with tablecloths and decorated with fruits, sweets, drinks, bread baked in the shape of babies, called "*tantawawas*," and photographs of the dead relative, so they are able to come and share these things temporarily.<sup>67</sup> *Todos Santos* ratifies the Andean balance between the living and the dead; the breads, sweets and drinks, especially *chicha*, are foods that are considered good for the deceased. My friends were as interested in the proceedings as I was; they did not take part in these festivities, although they enjoyed observing, as they had done as tourists at Aymara New Year. Early in the afternoon Abraham and Victor said they were leaving to go back to their maternal grandparents village near Achacachi (about two hours journey across the altiplano). They explained that their grandfather had died three years ago and this is the third and final year when his soul must be called back before finally going to rest. Around twenty friends and relatives of the brothers got onto buses to Achacachi, to visit the rural cemetery with baked bread dolls and to share in the festivities with the other villagers. We said goodbye and I continued exploring *Todos Santos* in La Paz. It was early evening when I received a phone call from the Achacachi travellers. They had arrived in the village, there hadn't been any 'real' music, only the traditional 'Peña,' (a group of musicians playing folkloric music together with traditional food and drink); they had become bored and were now back in La Paz. They asked if I wanted to out out dancing, which meant dancing in a club on one of the streets leading from La Paz up to La Ceja. For them, real music is music they can dance to in the city, in a disco. They take part in festivities in the village but they do not associate themselves with such practices as part of their identity. When I asked the brothers why

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66 The '*laderas*' are the hillsides where people have frantically, and often illegally, been building houses, particularly between La Paz and leading up to La Ceja but in all directions leading of the La Paz 'cauldron.' The majority of these houses are built on inclines over forty-five degrees. The hillsides are prone to landslides and houses often collapse.

67 The "children of bread" are reminiscent of the rite of Copachoa, during the Inca empire, when children were sacrificed to the gods of the supernatural world.

they had gone back to Achacachi in the first place they told me they do not believe in these 'superstitions' but would never say so to their parents. They respect that they do believe and also want to be involved in the life of their community.

Ultimately, the young shoe-shiners wanted to go to dance to what they consider 'real' music – the *cumbia*. This music originated in Colombia's Caribbean region, from the music of Native Colombians, slaves brought from Africa, and the Spanish during colonial times. It is very popular today in the Andes and has developed its own characteristics particular to many countries of Latin America. The fact that these young *alteños* prefer such hybrid music to traditional Andean music played in their ancestral village is an example of a further way in which their re-imagining of indigeneity varies from that of both the older generations and the state, which promotes folkloric music in its public celebration of festivals. Young *alteños* are choosing a more cosmopolitan engagement with modernity, involving elements of the past, knowledge and practices of older generations, and other external influences which set their preferences against those of their parents and grandparents. They are connected in some way to the rural; they do go back to Achacachi, but it is for the sake of their parents. This demonstrates the importance of maintaining family bonds but also the disparity between generations in terms of the significance of certain rituals and festivities. Young *alteños*, while maintaining strong familial bonds, are certainly, in some ways, moving away from their rural past, engaging ever more with the pull of the city and the global.

From focusing on the honouring of the dead the event has become more of a public spectacle and, in the city today, Halloween is becoming an increasingly popular alternative to *Todos Santos* among the younger generation. As Jhenny Quispe, aged

nineteen, from Zona Alto Villa Victoria, told me “*Due to migration, some people have started to follow the traditions of other countries, for example, Halloween instead of Todos Santos.*” The streets at this time of year are full of stalls selling broomsticks and pumpkins. The older generations are particularly aware of changes in the way the festival is conducted between countryside and city. Luisa Coloma, the mother of Hernán from FND, explained that “*For Todos Santos in the city they go to the cemetery only in the day but in the village they also go at night.*”

The “Feast of the *Ñatitas*” is held every Sunday following All Saints Day in the premises and church of the General Cemetery of La Paz (Fernández Juárez 2010). Koudounaris (2010) has written of this feast unique to Bolivia and, more specifically, La Paz.<sup>68</sup> The term '*ñatitas*' literally means “the little pug-nosed ones” and refers to human skulls which house the souls of the deceased and act as protectors, helpers and intermediaries for the living. The skulls – sometimes of known identity and passed down through the family, other times anonymous, and taken from cemeteries – are adopted by individuals or families who perform rituals in their honour. The Feast of *Ñatitas* has grown substantially over the last two decades, gaining devotees at all levels of society – *mestizos*, *alteños* and *paceños*. For most adherents, *ñatitas* provide luck and help ensure domestic tranquility. Small businessmen and women and street vendors are fond of them as an aid to economic success.<sup>69</sup> Adherents do not commemorate the deceased, however; rather, they celebrate the power of the deceased to affect the living,

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<sup>68</sup> Also see Spedding (2008).

<sup>69</sup> Despite its prominence, this cult of miraculous skulls is of mysterious origin. Most Bolivian anthropologists believe its roots are pre-Columbian, but there are no ancient precedents which exactly correlate to the present belief system. The earliest records which conform to the current practices date to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and imply that the emergence of the *ñatitas* is in fact due to a syncretism between indigenous beliefs and a local fixation on the more magical aspects of Catholicism. Indeed, the adherents of the *ñatitas* uniformly insist they are Catholic and, despite the condemnation of the Church, see no conflict in the use of their skulls (Koudounaris 2010).

and give thanks to the *ñatitas* with offerings and rituals.<sup>70</sup> In recent years the feast has been influenced by Protestantism, which is growing throughout Latin America. When I asked my friends about the significance of *ñatitas* I received responses which reveal the fact that many young people have only recently become aware of the existence of the phenomenon. They explained that since the Presidency of Morales people have been encouraged to conduct such practices more openly. Hernán Olmos told me

*“The festival of Ñatitas is every 8<sup>th</sup> of November. Many families and people worship the ñatitas. They have a skull which is, most of the time, specifically of a little boy or girl. I don't know where they have got the skulls from. If you know the place Merlan (mercado Lanza), which is situated in the Perez Velasco where we, the shoe-shiners, sometimes go for lunch, the women sellers of food (señoras vendedoras de comida) have their fiesta on the 8<sup>th</sup> November in honour of the ñatita. Once, talking to a woman from there, she told me that he is called Manuelito. That day the women held a mass. Previously, mass was made in the same place, in the Merlan market, and a priest came, but now it takes place in a Church. After the mass they all go to a local and dance and drink in honour of the ñatita. I have seen in the news that many families have their own ñatita for which they prepare food, flowers similar to at Todos Santos and they also take these to the Church. They say that the ñatita will help the family in its work and health. They say that the ñatita also gives them protection. It's a tradition that the devotees and believers here follow with much faith. I can tell you this.”*

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70 Most important is the desire that the skulls be able to hear a Mass and receive a benediction. The result is a remarkable service: several hundred people push their way into the chapel at 8:00am, jockeying for position, with their skulls placed either next to the altar or in rows in front of the pews, and await the reluctant appearance of a priest to lead them in prayer. Afterwards, the crowd files out and sets up camp on the cemetery grounds, creating a vibrant panoply of altars dedicated to their skulls. Up to ten thousand may congregate at the General Cemetery; many do not own their own *ñatita* but hope, on this day, to beg assistance from the skulls of others. During the Fiesta, the *ñatitas* arrive in style, in carved shrines or carried in litters. They are crowned by wreaths of flowers, and cotton is pressed into their eye sockets to provide them with sight. Some are given wool hats to ward off the morning chill, or dark glasses to protect them from the sun. Devotees offer cigarettes and candles. Although the Church does not officially recognise the Fiesta as a Catholic practice some priests agree to carry out the mass and some among the clergy even believe in the miraculous power of the skulls (Koudounaris. 2010).



Just as, in the previous chapter, whites are calling themselves indigenous without having rural origins or speaking an indigenous language - (as are young *alteños*) - they are also taking part in festivals and rituals which were not long ago only for indigenous peoples. In the midst of this change, young *alteños* are re-imagining their own indigeneity. For them, certain rituals, such as the cult of the *ñatitas*, do not serve a purpose and are viewed as mere superstition. This disparity between worship of the *ñatitas* by older generation *alteños* and, more recently, *mestizos* in La Paz, and young *alteños* is an example of the way in which the re-imagining of indigeneity among this group is just one among multiple indigeneities currently evolving in Bolivia.

In the following section I discuss the way in which a traditional festival, Carnival, is used by marginalised young *alteños* as a form of resistance, enabling them to make a claim to space in the city of La Paz, celebrating on an intimate scale and in their own style within the larger, formal, state-sponsored festival.

## **Carnival**

Carnival is one of the largest and most significant festivals in Bolivia. The ceremony begins forty days before Easter and stems from Andean customs, the ancient invocations centering around *Pachamama* (Mother Earth, transformed into the Virgin Mary due to Christian syncretism) and *Tío Supay* (Uncle God of the Mountains, transformed into the Devil).<sup>71</sup> Urban Aymara usually decorate the house and the most important possessions

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<sup>71</sup> Brought by the Spanish 'Carnival' from Latin it means to say goodbye to meat prior to Lent, so its date is the same in the whole Christian world: the three days before the start of the forty days of Lent, but in Bolivia, the Christian carnival united with Andean festivals or '*anatas*' of fertility and harvest. In the Andean farming cycle harvest starts in February, and with the union with Christianity the key date became the 2<sup>nd</sup> February, which is that of the Virgin of Candlemass (This was the first union, but later, in particular, the Virgin became associated with mining production. The Virgin of Oruro is the Virgen del Socavón (The Virgin of the Cave) – the virgin of the miners – but is still the Virgin of Candlemass. But the other association is with Tio de la Mina (a subterranean idol modelled on popular conceptions of the

are blessed. Among the young shoe-shiners of Los Heroés the majority chose to celebrate Carnival with their work colleagues in their territorial association. The boys met on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of February at Plaza Alonso de Mendoza. The plan, which never materialised, was to offer a *ch'alla* then travel by bus to a party in El Alto. Instead, we sat by a street stall, owned by a friend of one of the shoe-shiners, near the central bus station, and drank. The *ch'alla*, however, was still performed whilst sitting on the street. The fact that the planned ritual, in which the shoe-shiners would have danced and poured libations, sprinkling alcohol onto their shoe-shining boxes, never actually happened, was insignificant, since they were all together to share Carnival. Through their participation in their association celebration of Carnival they succeeded in developing the amity of what Turner calls 'communitas' as contrasted with 'structure' (Cohen 1993: 3).

On the following day, February 3<sup>rd</sup>, Los Heroés organised a party outside the Basilica of San Francisco. Speakers were borrowed from FND and pushed down El Prado, the main street through La Paz, in a wheel-barrow. It took a while to get them working, it was a scorching day and everyone was getting impatient. A collection tin was passed around to raise money for a crate of beer and a nearby restaurant donated chicken and *chuño* (freeze-dried potato) in plastic cartons. Various official stands were set up outside the Casa de la Cultura, on the other side of the street, with professional music and dance acts. Once the speakers were up and running those sounds were drowned out by 80's classics and the afternoon passed quickly in a daze of drunken laughter, dancing – and *ch'allas*. A few boys started break-dancing and a crowd gathered round. As onlookers threw water bombs into the performance a fight broke out. The crowds escalated,

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devil), who, for Aymaras and Quechuas, is the god of the mines).

cheering the fighters on. Finally, the police arrived, unplugged the power supply and everyone dispersed. The next day the headlines of a local newspaper read Carnival: 67 dead, 217 injured (nearly all were alcohol-related incidents).

This event is not merely an expression of belonging, a forging of bonds between the shoe-shiners, but an intervention. They set up their speakers and have their own celebrations amidst the official event on El Prado, infringing on the space of the tourists and whiter, wealthier *paceños*. In doing so, they challenge class and racial geographies – the informal versus the official. For young shoe-shiners, the celebration of Carnival, in the midst of the official state-sponsored festival, is an example of their autonomy as a group. Cohen, looking at the development of London's Notting Hill Carnival from its inception in 1965, has overcome the limited time depth that has plagued most studies of ritual behavior (1980, 1993). Identifying his approach as a “dramaturgical” one, he shows how the carnival has responded to various socioeconomic changes, taking on new meanings with each performance. Although the celebration, like all symbolic systems, is relentlessly multivocal and therefore “irreducible” to any one interpretation, he nevertheless argues that certain motivations and ideas emerge to dominate different phases. As a result, there is no single analysis that will apply to all performances of the carnival. As Cohen states: “It raise[s] the question of whether popular culture is an ‘opium of the masses,’ inspired by the ruling classes as part of the dominant culture, whether it is a counter culture, an ideology of resistance and opposition, or whether it is a contested ideological terrain” (1993: 134).

Through his discussions of ritual process and social drama, Turner has shown how both “separation” and “breach” establish a space in which intense social transformation can

occur (1969, 1974). However, this spatial and temporal boundary is not an exclusive, hermetically sealed world, particularly as new forms of mediation continue to redefine its borders. In addition to being set apart and framed, cultural performances are important dramatisations that enable participants to understand, criticise, and even change the worlds in which they live. These public displays provide forums in which communities or groups, such as that of the shoe-shiners, can reflect upon their own realities. Ritual and festivals are therefore both contentious and ambiguous, and while the basic structure of an event may be repeated, enough changes will be implemented so that meaning is redirected. As Guss says, cultural performance is a profoundly discursive form of behavior. Actors use these events to argue and debate, to challenge and negotiate. Thus, rather than thinking of cultural performances as simply “texts,” to be read and interpreted, a discursive approach recognises that they are dialogical and even polyphonic. They are fields of action in which both dominant and oppressed are able to dramatise competing claims (Guss 2000: 10). The young *alteño* shoe-shiners participate in activities in a way which sets them apart from the rest of the city. They celebrate on their own terms, apart from the commercial, touristic event. Rather than shying away and celebrating in a quiet location in La Paz, they choose to set up their speakers directly in front of the Casa de la Cultura, at the top of El Prado, the main thoroughfare of La Paz, in front of the Basilica of San Francisco. Despite the fact that they are eventually moved on by the police, they are nevertheless challenging their marginalised status and making a claim on the city.

## Remembering and Reinvigorating the Values and Practices of *El Pueblo*

This chapter has so far discussed the significance of three festivals to marginalised young *alteños* - the purposes the festivals serve to this generation and the ways in which they relate to hopes and ambitions for the future and to the beliefs and practices of parents and grandparents. It will now explore the significance of the values and practices of *el pueblo* to young *alteños*, asking to what extent they maintain links to the natal village of their parents and grandparents and how important such contact is to their urban lives. '*El pueblo*' can be translated as 'the village' or 'the people.' In Bolivia, '*el pueblo*' is often used to refer to the indigenous masses, particularly in politics, such as by Morales in his speeches to appeal to the indigenous majority. For centuries, people in the Andes have taken part in processes of physical and social mobility, through forced labour, commerce, and ritual journeys (Harris and Larson 1995). As described earlier in this chapter, rural migrants endow places with meaning in the city through communications with the natural environment as a source of prosperity. Indeed, powerful surroundings are appealed to in people's quest for belonging and progress in an urban context, such as through ritual payments, most often in the form of a *ch'alla*, to maintain relationships and to seek protection and success. In this quickly urbanising context, the countryside looms as a vital figurative resource for the re-imagining of indigeneity. Young *alteños* relate to their surroundings in active ways and engage in new processes of place-making, using the natural surroundings as mediators in their quest for belonging. For the majority of my *alteño* friends the natal *pueblo* of their parents and grandparents is a village on the altiplano in the department of La Paz, or in the surrounding mountain areas populated by Aymara communities.

I arranged a focus group discussion with young rappers and shoe-shiners, hoping to elicit some opinions on the role of indigenous rural values, practices and beliefs and to determine the frequency with which these young people visit their *pueblo*. The responses of these young *alteños*, all in their late teens or early twenties, demonstrate a strong attachment to their villages of origin, both in terms of the respect they have for the values of previous generations and also through the close contact they maintain through visits to help with agricultural tasks. Julia Serezo responded,

*'I learned ama llulla, ama sua, ama quella, the Aymara Trilogy, from my mother. With migration there have been changes like the Aymara trilogy wants to say don't rob in the country, but in the city robbery is almost normal. I am Aymara and afterwards Bolivian. The Aymara stamp is what makes me, what gives me my roots.'*

Braulco Serezo said,

*"I practice some Aymara traditions with my parents, such as the Aymara trilogy 'Ama llulla, ama sua, ama quella.' It's particularly important for young people to understand these traditions, to rescue the culture of Bolivia. Those rituals which remain are related to our spiritual well-being. I take part in the K'apichada ritual. Most people believe it frees them from bad vibes. I think it works. The passing on of knowledge and traditions forms a bond of honesty and trust between a father and son. I feel very proud of this knowledge."*

The responses of these siblings are confident; the passing down of knowledge from one generation to another and the strong bonds created through this process makes them sure of who they are. Julia and Braulco both describe a certain loss – of morals in the

city, where 'robbery is almost normal' and, as Braulco says, the need 'to rescue the culture of Bolivia.' Obviously he believes that rituals have been lost with migration, commenting that those that remain are related to spiritual well-being. Although these young alteños only take part in selected rituals for themselves, those which they consider relevant to life in the city – and for their parents – those which they may consider superstitious and irrelevant to their lives today – they still consider it important to understand these traditions as part of knowing their indigenous origins – i.e for an identity in the city.

Vanessa Mendoza responded,

*“Each pueblo has its different traditions but they respect and honour the community. The people of my pueblo have strong beliefs and do rituals to make things turn out well, like the harvest. I accompany my parents in their rituals. The people in the city [La Paz] are very racist against these traditions but people in El Alto know that the Aymara culture is stronger. I go to the countryside in the planting season and the cold season, to make chuño and tunta. It has a good atmosphere, something light.”*

She speaks of '*mi pueblo*' and describes how her village conducts rituals for a successful harvest. Although she was born in El Alto, has lived there all her life and may be considered to be thoroughly alteño, producing hip-hop and engaging with the modern, her words convey great attachment to the village. At the same time, she says she accompanies her parents in their rituals - i.e. these rituals do not belong to her in the way the village does, and indeed she to the village, but to the previous generation. She merely accompanies them in their practices. Her comment about the atmosphere of the countryside was reiterated by Abraham Bojorquez, who said, "*Rituals and ceremonies*

*are an important way of being in contact with the cosmovision andina. I go at least twice a month with friends and family to the campo, to be free of so much modernity.”*

Vanessa and Abraham do not wish to live a rural life or to necessarily practice all the rituals of their parents, yet visits to the natal village of their parents and grandparents, the opportunity to assist with planting and harvesting, enables them to be reminded of their roots and gives them strength to make a life in the city. It is a process of remembering where they came from and the rural values of their indigenous culture so as to be able to use this knowledge to make a claim to modernity on their own terms, asserting their indigeneity. A belief in the power of indigenous rural beliefs to influence destiny in the city is common among these young alteños. Simoteo Ibarra, a shoe-shiner, told me *“We are Indian races and I am Aymara at heart. My grandparents are from Colquire. Rituals are important to have a good life in the future.”* Alejandro Sullcamamani, who also works as a shoe-shiner and attends UMSA responded to my question about his participation in rituals,

*“I learned from my parents the calling of the souls. It’s when someone has shock, so they call the soul, el anima. .. In Aymara they say ‘ajayus, animos, jutam utaru, churamawa collqe, uta, manq’amampi’. It means ‘lost souls come to the house. I’ll give you money, things, your favourite food’.... Rituals work for curing and they don’t cost too much. One of my relatives was sick and then cured by rituals.”*

Both these comments demonstrate the significance of the older generations to the continuity of indigenous beliefs in the city; firstly to have a connection with a rural village (in the case of Simoteo, the village of Colquire) and secondly, for actual



indigenous knowledge (in the case of Alejandro, 'the calling of the souls') being passed from parents to children. Young alteños declare their rural links and the importance of rural values to their lives and identity in the city. Calestani describes the way in which her young alteño informants distinguish between the model offered by their parents, represented as 'good' and 'morally rich,' with the one offered by the city, which is 'bad' and 'amoral' (Calestani 2012: 549). For many young alteños the idea of a rural utopia assists them in dealing with deficiencies which they find in the urban context, such as poor moral values. Young alteños maintain strong links to the *pueblo* of origin of their parents or grandparents and do travel to the countryside to help their relatives, for example during the seasons of planting and harvesting (as well as for festivals such as *Todos Santos*, as described earlier in this chapter). They speak of “*mi pueblo*,” my village, even if they have never actually lived there.

When asked about values or traditions which may have been lost with rural to urban migration, Sergio Chaparro commented

*“In the city people don’t eat in big groups. Everyone speaks to you in the countryside. In the countryside people defend each other and there’s more solidarity. In the city we atomise ourselves, divide ourselves so there’s no such defence between people.”* According to Veronica Vargas, *“Greetings have been lost. There’s a load of strangers in the city. In the countryside all greet each other; even if they don’t know each other. It’s a sign of respect....You need to know your origins if you go abroad, to remember who you are.”*

Hernán Mamani, said, *“I live with my brothers and go three times each month to visit our parents. The identity of El Alto is a mixture of the city and the country. Some continue planting in their patios and raising cattle in the city. Many people can't forget what they did in the countryside.”* Hernán's comment is supported by the response of Leoncia Condori Mamani, almost eighty years old, who lives in Estrella de Belen, El Alto, and migrated from the community of Humapalka, Laricaja Province. She is the grandmother of one of the shoe-shiners and told me,

*“The kari kari is a person who has contact with the devil and through his chants makes people sleep, and then he steals their fat at the part of the waist with an instrument known only to them. ....We need rituals to thank mother earth and father sun, and the mountains. I call the spirits of the people who've suffered susto (fright), to call their spirit and read the coca. I used to give offerings to the mountains but not anymore. ...Apthapi, a sharing of food, and 'trueque', the exchange of products, have been brought to the city.”*

Francis Rodriguez of Wayna Tambo described the purpose of rituals and the problems which have arisen as a result of rural to urban migration and exposure to negative modern and global influences;

*“Rituals help have harmony with nature but there are problems. Culture and tradition finally become 'custom' - drunkenness, fights, degeneration. Diffusion of this is bad! Ch'allas to Pachamama in the city have become too involved with alcohol and danger. It's a custom endemic to the city rather than a tradition. We need to rescue our cultural heritage left by our grandparents because all these foreign influences are more liberal and cause shame in the conservative population.”*

Certain rituals are considered by *alteño* youth to be backward and irrelevant today, such as animal sacrifices to *Pachamama*. Efrain Chipana, a shoe-shiner, expressed his view, *“Rituals are important to have a peaceful life. I’m proud of my culture but there are some very superstitious beliefs, like killing animals for a good harvest, with a saumerio to have happiness, money and health.”* Many young *alteños* consider the burning of clothes at the festival of San Juan, for example, an unnecessary act of pollution. The Festival of San Juan celebrates what is supposedly the coldest day of the year in the Southern hemisphere. Large bonfires are lit and, in many cities, until recently – when the practice was outlawed due to the resulting pollution – anything unwanted was burned. Ricardo Guiterrez, a sixteen year old shoe-shiner, said, *“I went to a celebration for San Juan, where they damaged the environment, burning wood, clothes, rugs and everything.....That tradition has changed and it was for good reason.”* This change of attitude towards a traditional festival is due to their awareness, a result of modernity and exposure to global media, of climate change and environmental damage. Hortencia Chambi commented,

*“I feel first Aymara, later Bolivian, because the base of Bolivia is, and will be, Indian. Identity is ancestral history. My Aymara identity is how I know myself. Rituals are important as respect to culture and to nature. Our people have great respect for nature and with this also for humanity. I take part in the ch’alla at carnival to respect the earth. It’s a way of returning to the earth what we take from it and also to enjoy and leave the daily routine of city life. My parents are Christians so teaching their children our indigenous roots was not so important. They are far from their customs, but I will teach my children the natural cultures of Bolivia.”*

Hortencia's statement is particularly interesting as it demonstrates an important intergenerational change. Rather than becoming a Christian and following the way of her parents, she considers herself Aymara and plans to teach her own children about the indigenous cultures of Bolivia. Hortencia takes part in the *ch'alla* at Carnival and believes that, even in the city, it is necessary to give thanks to Mother Earth. Hernán Mamani shared her view, saying, *“Rituals are important because in their communications with the gods, Pachamama, Tata Inti, they make payments for different seasons, such as the planting, to have peace in the community. It's important to my parents that I know my roots, to value my grandparents and my people who came and taught the cultural values of Aymara.”*

Romero (2001), writing on ancient rituals and modern performances in the Mantaro Valley, Peru, explains that while the public realm seems to be the space for negotiating modernity, the private domain appears to be reserved for maintaining continuities with a rural “past” (Romero 2001: 35).<sup>72</sup> Young *alteños* are re-imagining their indigeneity not only for political support but, at a more intimate level, to create community and belonging. In the city, the focus remains upon the creation of community through ritual practice and the maintenance of links with *el pueblo*. However, these strong bonds and sense of community – their shared rural past and practice of “living tradition” - may be considered the essential base from which to resist their marginalised status.

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<sup>72</sup> The latter is the sphere of ritual and musical expressions linked to rural productive activities, such as the *herranza* (a fertility ritual aimed at the protection of land and livestock) and the *waylarsh* (a compound of games, dances, and songs tied to the harvests of beans, peas, wheat, and barley). These rituals are performed privately: in the context of the nuclear and extended family (in the case of the *herranza*) or strictly by the members of the peasant community who participate in communal labour (as happens in the *waylarsh*) (Romero 2001: 35).

## Conclusion

There is great variability in the significance of rural values, beliefs and practices to young *alteños*. Some do not involve themselves in such practices at all, or they agree to take part only when socially obliged to do so, for example to appease their parents. Overall, however, there is a powerful re-imagining of indigeneity underway with tradition undergoing particular transformations yet continuing through performance of and participation in rituals and festivals. *Alasitas* is an example of the updating or modernising of a practice traditionally for agricultural success and is extremely popular among young *alteños*. In contrast, *Todos Santos* – including *Ñatitas*, is unfamiliar to the young generation of *alteños*; they are more familiar with the celebration of Halloween. As in the previous chapter, in which young *alteños* attending Aymara New Year at Tiwanaku are closer to foreign tourists than rural Aymara in their style of celebrating, *Ñatitas* is equally a source of curiosity to them (Aymara New Year because it is an “invented” tradition, a remake of another festival on another date - San Juan - and *Ñatitas* because prior to the Presidency of Morales it had been a practice labelled as superstitious and therefore practiced surreptitiously). “Living tradition” is also being used as a force of resistance against their marginalised status, for example as in the participation of young shoe-shiners in Carnival. *Alteño* youth emphasise values of community and collectivity and a particular narrativisation of the earth to assert their indigeneity and so claim the modern.

Evidently, self-identification as indigenous is not dependent on a rural lifestyle or, as described in the previous chapter, on speaking an indigenous language.<sup>73</sup> However, in

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<sup>73</sup> Other countries have experienced a resurgence of indigenous identity in recent decades: the number of

contrast to Connerton's claim that 'modernity forgets,' young alteños maintain close contacts to their '*pueblo*' - in the sense of both both village and people - and place great value on familial bonds and intergenerational knowledge. They take what is useful from the past, re-imagining indigeneity to imagine the future. In the following chapter I will explore further the ways in which young alteños are using indigeneity, and particularly Aymara, as a means of empowerment, investigating the politicisation of indigeneity in hip-hop at La Casa Juvenil de las Culturas Wayna Tambo.

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people in the US identifying as indigenous doubled in the 1970s (US Bureau of the Census 1999); the same happened in Brazil in the 1990s (Warren 2001)



**Fig. 16: *Ch'alla* to *Pachamama* for the opening of a new carpentry workshop at Fundación Nuevo Día**



**Fig. 17: Cultivation in the Cordillera Apolobamba**





Fig. 18: Miniature objects bought to make offerings to *Ekeko* at Alasitas, 24<sup>th</sup> January



Fig. 19: A fortune-teller and herbalist outside her shop at La Ceja, El Alto





## Chapter V:

### Local Roots, Global Routes: Alteño Hip-Hop

*“Music should be universal, democratic – and hip-hop is a revolutionary genre, a form of rebellion.....Why not then adapt it to our scenario and to what we want to say? It is a powerful instrument of struggle. We still have ancient cultures thriving, like the Aymara and Quechua, the aboriginal peoples who have survived years of oppression and torture, but I believe we are now recovering that identity, renewing it; and people listen to us.....We want to preserve our culture through our music. With hip-hop we’re always looking back to our indigenous ancestors, the Aymaras, Quechuas, Guarani. We have lyrics about Black October.....We sing about coca, about poverty. Our singing is revolutionary. We protest without marches or strikes. We do it through music, to reach as many people as possible.”*

Abraham Bojorquez of Wayna Tambo participated in Bolivia’s IMF-related conflict in February 2003, the Gas Wars

In El Alto a new urban youth culture is emerging, consisting of a variety of artistic organisations that are increasingly acting as alternative channels for political action.<sup>74</sup> As described in earlier chapters, remaking, or recovering the past helps young alteños to recuperate a sense of self since the rural, indigenous past is something they can claim as their own. Aymara roots are being used as a valuable source of unification and empowerment, enabling young alteños to defend themselves in an environment which,

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<sup>74</sup> These critical groups (Agrupaciones Juveniles Criticas) are often characterised by a high degree of self-organisation and autonomy. They belong neither to a church nor to any other institution. There are a number of alternative, non-political areas of youth engagement and participation in El Alto, both formal and informal. Amongst the most important organisations responding to youth are the church (Pastoral Juvenil), workers' organisations (Asociacion de Jovenes Empresarios), the scouts (Asociacion de Scouts), sports associations, students' associations and various NGOs. There are also numerous non-institutional, informal youth groups in El Alto. About 800-1,200 more or less organised youth groups are estimated to be active in El Alto today (Merkle 2003).

until recently, they have had to downplay their indigeneity in order to '*avanzar*' (move forwards) in the city. Through hip-hop these young people use their own indigenous cultural capital and global transcultural capital to articulate identity. This chapter explores the ways in which the re-imagining of indigeneity currently underway among young *alteños* is expressed in hip-hop produced at La Casa Juvenil de las Culturas Wayna Tambo. It focuses particularly upon the ways in which young *alteños* are using symbols and values of indigenous and, more specifically, Aymara culture, such as the *wiphala*, *coca* and Aymara language to respond to racism and challenge their marginalised status.

Firstly, this chapter contextualises *alteño* hip-hop within the wider global hip-hop movement and discusses the meaning of 'authenticity' to these young rappers, focusing upon the significance of street experience to the creation of hip-hop. Poverty-related problems tend to be the beginning of the road leading to involvement in the world of hip-hop at Wayna Tambo. This media form is easily accessible and anyone in El Alto, regardless of socioeconomic status or musical training, is able to use hip-hop as a vehicle for change. Since there is a high degree of illiteracy and diversity of language and dialects, this media form, being versatile and adaptable, cheap and mobile, offers great potential for empowerment. The songs are collectively produced and performed. These young people are close to their family and community, as described in the previous chapter, but they also wish to create a sense of belonging among their peers, uniting for a shared cause, politicising their shared indigenous culture.

The current hip-hop phenomenon in El Alto is located within the historical context of protest music in Bolivia. The message - with marginalised people speaking out against

poverty, oppression and injustice - may be the similar, but what is new is the prominence of youth. For the first time young people are the creators of such protest music. They project a space of expression beyond El Alto's narrow and dusty streets without sacrificing the meanings that locate their songs within a long indigenous tradition of musical and cultural hybridity. The previous chapters focused upon the various ways of 'being indigenous' employed by the state, through political rhetoric and ceremonialism, and expressed by young *alteños* through their practice of rituals, participation in festivals and the maintenance of rural connections. In chapter three, Morales put indigeneity, and specifically Aymara on stage in his performance of Aymara New Year at Tiwanaku. Here we see young *alteños* themselves put indigeneity on stage in performances of hip-hop. In Bolivia, although hip-hop, can be read as a symbol of Westernisation, young people at Wayna Tambo are using this media form for cultural preservation and survival and as a means for circulating 'oppositional versions of history and culture' (Fox & Starn 1997: 7). This chapter discusses the ways in which improvisation and creativity are employed, with repeated up-datings (Hallam and Ingold 2007), in the hip-hop productions of young *alteños*.

Case studies from around the world have shown that hip-hop is localised, reworked with local expressions of culture, language, lyrical content, music and ethnic symbols, reflecting lived conditions, experiences, and grievances (Basu & Lemelle 2006; Motley & Henderson 2008; Osumare 2001). Prior to the Gas Wars of 2003 and 2005, the discourses of *alteño* youth involved in hip-hop were centred around street-related problems, with lyrics predominantly addressing issues such as homelessness, gang life and drugs. Their narrative has now shifted to address a wider social horizon. The power of hip-hop lies in its versatility and ability to challenge the status quo, incorporating

new sounds, rhythms, languages and cultural expressions. The Gas Wars represented the beginning of a new era – the moment to re-imagine Bolivia and the world, and productions at Wayna Tambo have since become increasingly political. The song lyrics come straight from life, depicting the social and political reality of the city. As the previous chapter discussed, young *alteños* are closely connected to their indigenous roots and, through what may be called ‘global routes’ in which they borrow from a transnational culture of hip-hop, they are determined to express their views and to be heard. This chapter explores the ways in which these young people appropriate hip-hop, make it their own and use it as a tool to protest and mobilise for change.

Furthermore, hip-hop is being used to educate. This chapter explores the ways in which hip-hop may be considered as a social “text” which “educates listeners” inside and outside the classroom (Baker 1991; Powell 1991); part of a “lived” curriculum Dimitriadis (2001). It investigates the impact this media form is having in El Alto and beyond, on young and older generations. Whereas, previously, it was often *mestizo/criollos* who represented the nation through their folk music, standing up for the rights of indigenous people, as in the period of *Indigenismo*, today it is the marginalised themselves who are staking their claim to a modernity, bringing the past to life in the present day and projecting it forward into the future. By spreading their political messages through rapping workshops, studio time and hip-hop festivals, these young *alteños* are playing a crucial role in the current cultural revolution underway in Bolivia. Through hip-hop, they are breaking down class and ethnic boundaries; they are dissolving difference between old and young, *mestizo* and indigenous. They are negotiating between politics and culture in ways that express a sophisticated awareness of their own power as cultural innovators and moral actors. This power is recognised by

both President Morales and the older generations. Currently, young alteño rappers are largely in support of Morales and his government but, as song lyrics denouncing the political actions of President Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada (Goni), which resulted in the notorious Gas Wars, demonstrate, they will not be afraid to challenge Morales and the MAS if their political views conflict. They are engaging with formal state institutions and yet maintaining autonomy to a vital freedom of expression. Through this modern, global media form these previously voiceless young people are given a voice, influencing other young people to become more politically engaged and changing their society through a re-imagining of indigeneity.

### **Authenticity of the Street**

Rap music emerged in the mid-1970s in New York City (McGregor 1998) as an alternative media to contest the dominant discourse, a channel for youth voices in the face of marginalisation. During the 1980s, genres of rap became more noticeable, and many rappers turned to more overtly political themes such as poverty, racism and police brutality (Martinez 1997). Most scholars agree that there are four main elements of hip-hop culture: graffiti, break dancing, “DJing,” and “MCing.” Graffiti is the visual art and break dancing is an element of the performance art of the hip-hop culture. The disk jockey (DJ) selects and blends the background music tracks. Originally, the master of ceremonies (MC) introduced the DJ and the music. To generate excitement, the MC would encourage and greet the audience with verbal exchanges. Over time, the practice developed into a style called “rapping” (Hager 1984). Similar to the West-African traditions of storytelling with song lyrics (Keyes 2002; Osumare 2001), rappers would

comment upon their personal struggles, frustrations and joys. Early “....rap's dance, poetic, lyrical content [was] often underpinned by African-American messages about a historical marginalised status” (Osumare 2001).

Hip-hop has evolved from a localised art form with its origins in the streets of the Bronx to a cultural phenomenon that resonates throughout a global community. The storytellers (hip-hop artists) and listeners use the hip-hop aesthetic to express their individual perceptions, collective memories and political views and to protest against the dominant culture. The global appeal of the hip-hop aesthetic “has led to its being productively used in new social and linguistic environments” (Androutsopoulos and Scholz 2003: 463). This global commonality of connective marginality combined with local elements (e.g., language, lyrical content, music, ethnic symbols) that create unique sounds and statements has been described as glocalisation (Motley and Henderson 2008: 252). While the core elements of hip-hop are shared by all members of the hip-hop culture, the aesthetic is adapted to suit multiple national cultures, localised conditions and grievances. As such, the genre is imbued with issues, language, and other cultural markers reflective of local environments. Osumare (2007) proposes the paradigm “connective marginalities” that links culture, class, and historical oppression among youths around the world. In many instances, non-U.S. hip-hop sects combine both the culture presented in U.S. hip-hop with their everyday lives and specific cultural norms. Thus, although many of these global hip-hop sub-segments take cues from African-American hip-hop, they also imbue it with an inventiveness and creativity so it becomes uniquely theirs, and represents their pains, struggles and political issues. As Osumare says, “Hip-hop's connective marginalities.... are social resonances between black expressive culture within its contextual political history and similar dynamics in

other nations” (Osumare 2001: 172).

In the global hip-hop community today, lyrics are real reflections of the marginalised experiences of the artists and their audiences as they were for the 1970s U.S. innovators. Hip-hop artists around the world use this media form to speak to specific social issues and political concerns. For example, rap allows underemployed youth in Tanzania to participate politically in public discourse (Remes 1999), while in Zimbabwe, it enables privileged urban youth to display personal aspirations through cultural style (Neate 1994).<sup>75</sup> Dimitriadis (2001) describes how African American teenage boys in the Midwest use Southern rap music to construct a community around a nostalgic Southern tradition. Likewise, a great deal of cultural production among first – and second – generation immigrants to the United States involved a kind of neo-traditionalism in which elements of the heritage culture are selectively appropriated and resignified. In the Indian American desi music scene in Chicago, diasporic and modern Indian musical genres such as film music and house bhangra are imagined as traditional (Diethrich 1999/2000; Maira 1999). Such cultural forms lead to new ethnicities insofar as new panethnic identities emerge from this syncretic practice (Buff 1998). In Germany, hip-hop grew in the 1990s along with German nationalism, and rap offered a public vehicle of anti-racism and anti-xenophobic protest, by and on behalf of threatened out-group members (Cheeseman 1998). Lyrics stated that second-generation Turks should have civil rights, such as German passports and other rights afforded German citizens. In these early years, Turkish-German hip-hop gained significant media attention (Cheeseman 1998). Cuban youths also used hip-hop as a political voice in attempts to

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<sup>75</sup> Although hip-hop is currently the cultural form most widely appropriated into new contexts around the world, other musical styles may also be resources for local identity-making. In West Africa, reggae serves as a mediating link between Africa and the African diaspora, and reggae forms often become re-Africanized in local contexts through the addition of traditional linguistic and cultural elements (Savishinsky 1994).



promote racial egalitarianism. Cuban rappers wrote lyrics that promoted inclusion of marginalised sectors in processes of economic and political change. These efforts were fuelled by the discrimination against and treatment of the mostly Black working class individuals residing in Cuba's public housing developments (Fernandes 2003).

The hip-hop phenomenon made its first appearance in Bolivia in the 1990s, just when the social effects of the structural adjustments were being felt. It initially arrived in La Paz but its core quickly shifted to the relatively new, poor and marginalised city of El Alto, where the movement rapidly gained strength.<sup>76</sup> As Santos, one of the creators and current manager of Wayna Tambo commented, one of the reasons for hip-hop thriving in El Alto rather than neighbouring La Paz may be that *“In the case of La Paz, hip-hop has not been able to build a movement, a proposal with their own root.....and if one looks at who is doing hip-hop in El Alto, they are migrant kids, migrant’s children, so their link to their roots is more cultivated.”* The appropriation of hip-hop as a tool of cultural resistance is not something that is characteristic of Bolivian hip-hop in general (Librado 2010). Broadly speaking, outside of El Alto the rap is less political and more about fashion, making a name and a profit (Librado 2010: 53). Initially, with little money or experience with commercial music, the rappers at Wayna Tambo played on their radio show, “Rincon Callejero,” “The Street Corner.” Renzy, one of the main radio producers, explained that having found in the lyrics of hip-hop a source of identity, he participated in a radical program in an ‘underground radio’ which offered him the possibility to be in control and “have a say.” This kind of media constituted the first sparkle of hip-hop in El Alto.

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<sup>76</sup> In the 1990s the relationship between the richest and poorest quintile was 1:90, which made Bolivia one of the most unequal countries in the world (Rivero 2006).

Individuals involved in hip-hop tend to represent marginalised sectors of their own respective society (Basu & Lemelle 2006; Motley & Henderson 2008; Osumare 2001). Perullo describes how, in the 1990s, Tanzanian youths who adopted the hip-hop culture were deemed “hooligans,” because the perception was that individuals who adopted this culture were violent, hostile and disruptive (Perullo 2005). In an effort to combat these accusations, the youth used the music and their consumption of other items to portray themselves instead as “creative and empowered individuals in society” (Perullo 2005: 76). Young *alteños* are faced with similar discrimination, based upon the fact that they are descendants of rural Aymara people and also that they live in El Alto. For young *alteños*, involvement in the production of hip-hop represents both the chance to belong to a community and to contribute to important processes of social and political change.

While hip-hop in the US started as an urban underground movement, it is now a major commercial product and sales often count more than artistic quality, creativity or political message (Fernandes 2003: 581). As commented by Powell, corporate control and marketing have deadened hip-hop’s political edge (Powell 2000). Critics from within the global hip-hop community argue that many contemporary artists have abandoned antiracism messages and focused instead on money and sexual exploits (Powell 2000). They say that corporate control and the desire to reach a ‘wider and Whiter’ audience has led rap away from overtly antiracist messages (Sullivan 2003: 608). There is a tension between authenticity or “keeping it real” and profitability or “selling out” (Grier et al 2006). In some cases artists are no longer telling their life stories but appear to be attempting to gain business contracts. Hess (2005: 297) proposes that authenticity is essential in building credibility within hip-hop: “A successful performance of hip-hop authenticity is one which positions the artist as

“experienced knower.”<sup>77</sup>

For young *alteño* rappers authenticity comes from experience of the street, i.e. living and/or working on the street. Abraham Bojorquez, twenty-four, of Wayna Tambo, left home in El Alto aged twelve due to economic problems. His mother had moved from the countryside to El Alto, where she met his father. Abraham went to Brazil where he worked in a sweatshop and experienced gang life for a short period. He became involved in hip-hop in poor neighbourhoods in Brazil and brought it back to El Alto, where he became a member of the popular hip-hop group Ukamau y Ke. In an early interview at Wayna Tambo Abraham told me, *“From the first time I heard it, I have identified with it because hip-hop tells many truths. Even when I was younger it seemed that it knew my life. It talked about poverty, the streets, discrimination.”* This view was reiterated by many of my friends, including Tony Colque, aged twenty-two. Tony, who has been involved in the production of hip-hop at Wayna Tambo for eight years, explained

*“I became involved in hip-hop to express the truth, the discrimination. We are transparent and influenced by the suffering of people of the street. Our music is political, for the people, el pueblo. It’s for el pueblo de realidad. Society listens to us. My hip-hop is in every way related to the street, because I am street (yo soy calle).”*

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<sup>77</sup> The commercialisation and globalisation of hip-hop have complicated the authentication process in American hip-hop. For instance, the appropriation of U.S. hip-hop culture can lead to perceptions of parody and mimicry. It has been suggested that Japanese youth lack the “ghetto experience, cultural wards, and racial disharmony” (Schwartz 1999: 365) that spark many of the lyrics and feelings behind hip-hop, that “blackness” on the streets of Tokyo is a commodity instead of a lifestyle, an icon rather than the real thing. However, others indicate that some Japanese youths relate to connective marginalities, albeit in a different form. That is, these youths view hip-hop as a way to distinguish themselves from the homogeneous mainstream environment (Condry 2000a and 2000b: 166).

These young *alteños* are committed to improving the lives of marginalised young people in Bolivia. Although many have had difficult experiences of formal education, either having to drop out to make money to support themselves and their families or because they have not found the experience rewarding, often feeling they could be learning more in 'real life' outside academic establishments, they still persist in attempting to attend school or university and obtain some kind of official qualification. They talk of the value of lessons learned through hip-hop and life spent living and/or working on the street but most still aspire to leave - or have already left - the street. Their purpose at Wayna Tambo, besides having a significant role in the politics of their country, is to prevent young people ending up on the streets. Many of the young people at Wayna Tambo attend university and work part-time jobs. Rapping is their hobby and their passion but it is not lucrative and they wish to keep it that way, maintaining the autonomy to express their views freely rather than "selling out." For example, Ruben Carrillo, who is twenty-three years old, has attended UMSA for twelve years and is a rapper at Wayna Tambo. He told me,

*"The aim is to use hip-hop as an instrument of struggle, to bring awareness to the people. I became involved with Wayna Tambo in the street, knowing the brothers and family that you don't know in your home. I knew about rap from listening to tapes of Cypress Hill. I've been involved since '97. I've worked since I was young, in minibuses, and selling yoghurt. I try to express what I've seen, what I've lived. The information that hip-hop comes from the US is wrong, because hip-hop is a culture of the street. That is to say, it doesn't have flags. It was born in the barrios before any country. It's universal. It's the voice of the street. Everything a rapper does is to change the life of the young people in gangs and in poverty"*

Cristian Tarqui is in his early twenties and studies at UMSA. He said,

*“I became involved in Wayna Tambo for techno dance, twelve years ago. I am involved in many other jobs to survive, such as in selling artesanía. I try to express Bolivia in my work, to represent my race. Hip-hop is influenced by folkloric music. This music is for Bolivia. The fact that hip-hop came from the US is not contradictory because we don't express the US; it's only the genre. It's inspired by the street because in the street you see everything.”*

Freddy Salazar is twenty-five and lives alone in El Alto. He studied at school until first year of secondary then left due to lack of funds;

*“I also work as a mechanic. I am trying to express what I know of reality, and am also influenced by black rap. I aim to transmit peace, not war. It's for the oppressed – the streets don't have differences or colours.”*

Music and dance have always played an important role in the definition of the Aymara self and community. They must be understood as fundamental rituals through which the community is continuously created, and through which individuals embody and express their identity (Calestani 2012: 552). The performance of hip-hop may be considered as one way in which young alteños maintain contact with the natal village of their parents or grandparents; to the values, beliefs and practices associated with rural life and *Pachamama* (Mother Earth) discussed in the previous chapter. The majority of these young people do have close bonds with their families in El Alto but they also aspire to belong to a group of peers, to share and comment upon the experience of growing up influenced by both local roots and global routes.

Several authors have remarked on the importance of movement in a comprehension of twentieth century identities and the importance of shifting our ethnographic projects to account for regional integration and marginalisation (Tsing 1993: xi), “new forms of dwelling and circulating “ (Clifford 1998: 13), identities formed “on the move” (Chambers 1994: 25), and translocal phenomena like the state (Gupta 1995: 376). As Feld has indicated, “Music becomes a particularly poignant locale for understanding roots versus rootlessness...” (Feld 1994: 269). In his study on nationalism, Anderson (1991) argues that national communities were imagined through the spread of print capitalism and the common reading of newspapers and novels published in vernaculars; this shared textual/symbolic world held the imaginative power to enlist members in the killing of others in the name of the abstract concept of the nation. As Bigenho (2002) points out, there are limits to thinking about national communities only through the precondition of a literate and actively reading citizenry. Bigenho talks about “musically performed imagined communities.” Whereas Anderson wrote about a nation that read common texts, Bigenho aims to portray a nation that listens to, dances, and feels an imagined common bond (Bigenho 2002: 3). She describes musical performance as one venue through which people establish a sense of belonging to local and national communities, as both performers and listeners, and this sense of belonging is felt through a particular representation of one's past and the relationship of that past to an individual's present situation (Bigenho 2002: 19). She says this link is made through shared narrative forms that attribute to the history of nations the “continuity of a subject” (Balibar 1991: 86). For young *alteño* rappers, this subject is indigeneity.

One significant reason for initially joining a hip-hop group may be that membership can help young people deal with cultural alienation and discrimination. In the absence of

recreational spaces and organised leisure activities, the youth group often becomes the most important opportunity to make friends. They may also simply enjoy the experience of expressing their creativity through music. For instance, it has been shown that rap helps low income African American youth develop empowering beliefs that help them connect with their culture and develop positive identities (Berry 1994). Merkle (2003), conducting research on young people in El Alto, believes that rather than a genuine interest in politics, the development of self-confidence might be a more relevant issue in this phase of life. However, I have found that, at least among the young people at Wayna Tambo, they are closely involved with both local and national political affairs and determined to have their say. The formation of various crews composed of hip-hop fans, artists, musicians and dancers may be considered as new kinds of families which provide insulation and support, and many of these, in fact, contribute to the community-building networks that serve as the basis for new social movements. Of course young *alteños* do not aspire to be 'street' - living and/or working on the street - but in the current economic and social climate, with high rates of unemployment in El Alto, they are making the most of their limited resources. Just as the shoe-shiners do this by formalising their work, engaging with modern structures, rappers are able to use their shared street experience and indigeneity to help solve problems in society and achieve a sense of belonging to an influential community. At Wayna Tambo young *alteños* are not "selling out." They maintain their autonomy and are therefore able to create, improvise and politicise as they wish. *Alteño* hip-hop is not a form of passive 'subculture' but an attempt to constitute a counterculture, primarily built upon Aymara language and culture. This challenges those who think that hip-hop, because it proceeds from the USA, promotes the loss of the autochthonous (Marin and Muñoz 2002). As Abraham Bojorquez declared, "*We can't and don't want to talk about the same things as*

*American rappers – girls, drugs and sex.*” In their quest for belonging and social change, young alteños become Aymara patriots, developing a local, native-based expression and self-construction from their cultural roots.

### **A New Political Consciousness: Reconnecting Indigenous Protest Past and Present**

*“From Bolivia, heart of dark skinned America, we come: miners, Indian peasants, students, men, women and children. We form a circle of raised fists, we say to those who stomp on our flag and steal our resource, “Enough. It’s time for rebellion!”*

These are the lyrics of Nilo Soruco, a famous protest singer banned under the Bolivian dictatorship of the 1970s. Soruco wrote over three hundred songs committed to the social and political struggles of South America, preaching justice and equality for his homeland. In 1971, Colonel Hugo Banzer Suarez seized control of Bolivia after staging a violent military coup. Banzer's reign as dictator proved to be a gruesome and bloody time in Bolivian history, during which thousands fled to seek asylum in other countries. In 1974 a price increase in basic goods lead to a peasant uprising, where locals formed roadblocks in Cochabamba, singing songs of resistance and calling for a change. They were then brutally slaughtered by the military.

The roots of modern Bolivian protest music can be traced back to the Spanish civil war (1936-39), during which music carried the hopes of those fighting against Franco's



fascist army. These songs of freedom were carried to Latin America by Spanish immigrants and protest music in Bolivia evolved from this moment, gradually and then rapidly in 1959, spurred on by the Cuban Revolution. Cuban musical trends like the Nueva Trova, which harmonised revolutionary lyrics with traditional Cuban rhythms, nurtured the roots of a musical resistance across the continent, encouraging the working class to change their situation. Its lyrics spoke a socialist message of empowerment to the poor and oppressed. The movement gathered a great Bolivian following amongst a number of musicians and activists of the time. In Nueva Trova style, traditional harmonies were combined with messages of social change.<sup>78</sup> The chaos of the 1970s and 80s gave rise to a new generation of singers that replaced rhythmic strumming of the folk guitar with the speed and fury of hip-hop. *Alteño* hip-hop aims to speak to the young, show them the injustices of the world they live in and inspire them to try and change that world. The sounds and tempos are new yet they speak with the same message as Soruco: let us stand up for injustice and sing songs of freedom. At Wayna Tambo rap music blends traditional Andean folk styles and new hip-hop beats with lyrics about revolution and social change and rhymes from MTV music videos. Rap lyrics are in indigenous languages (Aymara, Quechua and Guarani) and Spanish and the rappers wear the *poncho* and *chullo* over baggy clothing characteristic of U.S. hip-hop. Three words make a regular appearance: *coca*, revolution and *Pachamama* (Mother Earth).

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<sup>78</sup> For example in the songs of Benjo Cruz, an Argentinian-born Bolivian during the late 1960s, who became known as one of Bolivia's most famous and influential folk singers. His politically charged songs mirrored the feelings of people under the military government, stirring civil unrest within the country. Cruz's lyrics went on to inspire during the turbulent, dark times of the 1970s and 80s

<http://www.bolivianexpress.org/blog/posts/songs-of-freedom#sthash.gzGMJXdb.dpuf>.

Young people involved in the creation of *alteño* hip-hop seek to build bridges between the long memory of indigenous struggles and the memory of more recent events. Whereas hip-hop previously focused upon themes related to street life, messages have become increasingly political since the Gas Wars of October 2003 and 2005 in which many of these young people were directly involved in political and social violence for the first time. Wayna Tambo may be considered a site for 'political intervention and the articulation of new kinds of political identities' (Kondo 1997: 22). The relationship between art and politics developed significant nuances after the so-called Black October massacre in 2003. Most of the young hip-hoppers took part in the protests of the first two weeks of October. Although these events were full of contradictions and brought with them a considerable number of deaths, they represented also the beginning of a possible change. This incident showed them a reality which was not familiar beyond the stories heard by those who had experienced the dictatorships in the late 1970s and early 1980s and demonstrated the need to rethink history in the context of the intensification of social struggles, particularly in regards to the city's Aymara ethnic identity. The events of 2003 affected the discourses of young *alteños* and their perceived role in the change process. Since then, they have increasingly realised the potential of hip-hop to evoke the experiences of the victims and to demand justice. A new mixture of anger, pain and hope was born and is reflected in the hip-hoppers' lyrics.

In "The people Do Not Fall," a song composed by Abraham Bojorquez in 2005 and performed by his two-man rap group, Ukamau y Ke, the lyrics seek to capture the violence to which indigenous protesters have been subjected. It heaps scorn on the former president, Sánchez de Lozada ('Goni'), and condemns the state for selling Bolivia's natural gas. Abraham describes the way in which the rappers "speak about

how bullets are being shot at the people and how we can't put up with this because the people are reclaiming their rights." This song starts with a recording of President Sánchez de Lozada announcing his refusal to resign, '*Yo no voy a renunciar. Yo no voy a renunciar*' (I will not resign). The sounds of street clashes in the song become louder. The roar of machine guns and helicopters come and go until the lyrics begin. '*We are mobilised, arming street barricades. We are mobilised without noticing that we are killing between brothers*'. Another singer comes in, rapping about the '*corrupt governments....with closed eyes that don't really look at the reality of society. Many people are ending up in poverty and delinquency, which is why they demand justice*.' The song goes on to call Sánchez de Lozada a traitor and assassin. The music fuses with a testimony from a weeping woman whose family member was shot by soldiers. The lyrics continue, '*We hear over there that there are dead: eighty citizens, five police, and a mass of people gravely injured. We're in a situation worse than war, killing each other without a solution*.'

The song '*Estamos con la Raza*' (We are with the Race) contains numerous symbols from the Aymara culture and from the revolutionary history of Bolivia, such as references of the *Pachamama* and Tupak Katari, an Aymara leader who fought against the colonial forces at the end of the 1770s. He was captured and executed but before dying he pronounced the now famous phrase: "You can kill me now but tomorrow I will come back and I will be millions." Bartolina Sisa, Tupak Katari's wife, also fought against the colonial forces and was murdered after her capture. After his murder by the Bolivian army in 1967, Che Guevara, one of the leaders of the Cuban Revolution, became one of the most important symbols of justice and struggle all over the world. As Morales connects himself to his "fallen brothers," (Chapter three) so alteño hip-hoppers

draw similar connections to heroes of their indigenous past.

For example,

*We are the incarnation of the immortal Pachamama, here the calm for the  
traitors is*

*over (...)*

*Here, Tupak Katari comes back as millions of native people immortals*

*We are real warriors, the miners are ready for the fight, blood of guerilla*

*Here the street youth are supporting the movement, uniting forces with the  
miner*

*brothers (...)*

*I want to say to you what's up, we are son of chola, we have well dressed  
the tolas*

*Breaking the scheme of this monstrous system and there have appeared  
more bartolina*

*women, tough women peasants with pure anger*

*Tupak Katari is coming back, we are already here, real natives that keep  
expanding every*

*year to Bolivian territory, we are already many like the Commander Che  
Guevara,*

*revolutionaries, pijchando the coca leaf ready to get rid of these people that  
provoke us*

*Here we are and we are not leaving, we represent the culture, always with  
harsh hand*

*It seems you are doubting, fire up with my race and you'll see it will torture  
the same*

(Song: Estamos con la Raza. Performer: Ukamau y Ke, CD: Por la Raza)

Similarly, the CD 'Klanes del Alto,' which the rappers recorded in 2005 with Wayna Tambo productions;

*“Hip hop with altura in Bolivia, is culture showing diversity, maya, paya, kimsa, pusi, with unity, proudly raising the wiphala, I say to these people that the culture they cannot throw it in the rubbish, and if you get rid of what is my charango, my wiphala and my quena, that is a tragedy”*

(Song: Kallajtamapi, Performer: MLU, CD: Klanes del Alto).

*“(...) because I am son of cola, alcohol and coca, be a lover of my culture and my tradition, grow in the land of discrimination”*

(Song: Proyecto Armado, Performers: Armados con Odio. CD: Klanes del Alto)

Such lyrics reflect the search for a remake of Aymara identity; a re-imagining of indigeneity in the context of new political and social processes. The rappers emphasise their solidarity with the Aymara culture by mixing Spanish with Aymara lyrics<sup>79</sup> and with indigeneity more generally, through references to pride in the *wiphala*, the flag of indigenous nations, and musical instruments such as the *charango* (the small Andean stringed instrument of the lute family) and the *quena* (the traditional Andean flute). References to alcohol and *coca* incite images of the offering of *ch'allas* to *Pachamama* and other Andean deities and reflect the respect of the rappers for the indigenous symbol of the *coca* leaf. As described in Chapter three in the context of the use of the *coca* by Morales at Aymara New Year, “the sacred leaf,” is the most important symbol of Andean and Bolivian “culture” in the discourse, practice, and politics of the current protests. It has been used throughout the Andes by ancestors since before recorded

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<sup>79</sup> (maya, paya, kimsa, pusi translates as one, two, three, four).

time.<sup>80</sup> These young people are calling on their rural roots to empower and influence.

Kaya has described such a 'bricolage' character in rap produced by Turkish immigrants in Berlin (Kaya 2002: 56). He considers this rap culture to be an imaginative journey back home, with the Turkish musicians employing *arabesk* (the expression of their parental culture) as a musical and cultural form which bridges the gap between the displaced Turkish diaspora and the 'imaginary homeland' (Kaya 2002: 52). They use an emerging global cultural form (hip-hop) and a granted local cultural form (*arabesk*) for their own counter-hegemonic expressive purposes. This syncretic 'double consciousness' simultaneously points at Turkey and Berlin, past and present, as well as local and global (Kaya 2002: 53). In a similar way, young *alteños* have a double consciousness which points both towards modernity and the future – the global, and to older generations and tradition. The past, for young *alteño* rappers, is not static but vibrant and negotiable; adaptable to present day situations and aspirations.

Rappers at Wayna Tambo show solidarity with other indigenous Bolivian peoples and in 2009 produced a CD by Ukamau y Ke with the title 'La Ciudad de Los Ciegos: Jornadas Contra Racismo' (City of the Blind: March against Racism). The subject for the lyrics of the nine songs on this CD, accompanied by two video clips ('Medios Mentirosos' and 'Ya Se Levantan'), are inspired by the events which occurred in the city of Sucre on 24<sup>th</sup> May 2008. A large group of indigenous citizens, who had arrived in a long march from

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<sup>80</sup> Keeping the leaves inside your mouth and swallowing their juice is believed to give strength and keep people awake. It was, and still is, used by the miners in order to bear the long and hazardous hours of work. *Coca* is a natural medicine. Millions chew it to sustain themselves against the harsh conditions of the altiplano. It is used to make *coca* tea, chewing gums, *coca* wines, shampoos, and even toothpaste. Some read the leaves to predict the future. Sharing *coca* leaves is a form of social bonding.

the countryside to meet Morales and to celebrate a national anniversary, were attacked by a group of urban residents who, impervious to the many cameras that documented the event, insulted the indigenous marchers as animals, stripped them of their clothing and emblems, and, once naked, forced them to declare their allegiance to the non-indigenous nation-state imagined by these urbanites (*El Correo del Sur* [Sucre], May 25, 2008). As De la Cadena comments, the violence suggested a moment when, refusing to accept the end of the racist biopolitics that had ruled the country until recently, the regional dominant class decided to overtly kill Indians, viewed as usurpers of the power the elites had wielded for centuries (De la Cadena 2010: 357). This isolated event provides further evidence of the injustices which young alteños convey by politicising culture in the media of hip-hop.

Rowe and Schelling call attention to the process by which nation-states attempt to suppress histories different from the official one. They create their own homogenising histories, with their own national heroes, which tend to disregard particular memories of struggles, resistance, and oppression (Rowe and Schelling 1991: 228-229).<sup>81</sup> Besides using rap to express their rage against social and political injustices of previous governments and contemporary incidents of racism and discrimination, young alteños express their support for the ‘democratic and cultural revolution’ of Evo Morales. Cristian Tarqui, who is twenty-one and produces hip-hop at Wayna Tambo, told me, “*Morales brings the name of Aymara to El Alto. Youth activism aims to denounce the disunity of our land.*” Bigenho, conducting fieldwork in the two rural Andean areas of Toropalca and Yura, says that individuals did not refer to their own music as “bolivian,” “indigenous,” or “traditional” (Bigenho 2002: 21). In El Alto today, young rappers do

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<sup>81</sup> In the Mantaro Valley, for example, the maintenance of social memories distinct from the narratives of “national history” is fundamental to the reaffirmation of the regional identity of the Mantaro Valley (Romero 2001).

use these terms, defiantly proclaiming their indigeneity and identity as Indian. They talk about the need to take into account criticisms of the Morales government, but also to look at it from a different perspective, from beyond the borders of Bolivia, to compare their own situation to political situations elsewhere in the world. Whilst they attest to the fact that a cultural revolution is underway and much has improved for indigenous peoples in recent years, incidents such as that in Sucre on 24<sup>th</sup> May 2008 serve to remind them that the struggle continues and to inspire them to influence as wide an audience as possible on topics such as discrimination and particularly racism.

### **Hip Hop as Social “Text”**

In his classical work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (1970) proposes an alternative approach to education that centres on the active participation of the students in their education. “This pedagogy makes oppression and its causes objects of reflection by the oppressed, and from that reflection will come their necessary engagement in the struggle for their liberation” (Freire 1970: 48). As mentioned earlier in this chapter, young *alteño* rappers are familiar with the struggles of balancing attendance at school or university with the more immediate need to earn a living. Hip-hop is a particularly effective media form for spreading messages to the people; it has potential value as a social “text” which “educates listeners” both inside and outside the conventional classroom (Baker 1991; Powell 1991). This media form is being used by *alteño* rappers to educate a wide range of audiences outside the classroom.



Bolivian society has experienced a “return of the Indian,” to borrow a phrase from Albó (1991). Indians have not disappeared and suddenly reappeared at the end of the twentieth century, but rather claims to indigenusness have acquired a new value and currency in both government programs and popular politics of Bolivia. Cultural differences are articulated through the official Bolivian nationalism of the state as well as through the popular nationalism of people living within Bolivian territory (Bigenho 2002: 4) - including young *alteño* rappers. Hip-hop performances enable these young people to continually reconfigure their identities, expressing their support or opposition for the actions of the state. Often this process is imperceptible, with the event appearing as a mere affirmation of the relations that already exist. At other moments, however, groups will shift the way in which history is told, to rethink the boundaries of a community, or to reconsider issues of race and ethnicity. Hip-hop is encouraged by the government of Morales and rappers have the freedom to perform to diverse audiences. Young rappers at Wayna Tambo are regularly invited to perform and teach hip-hop classes around Bolivia, making an impact on young people in jails and mining communities.

Inspired by the ideas of Freire, Pardue (2004), has examined hip-hoppers' and social workers' claims that hip-hop is an alternative system of education in São Paulo, Brazil. According to Pardue, hip-hop stands out as one of the few forms of expression which policy implementers (e.g. educational psychologists, social workers, and cultural department directors), have recognised as a potential medium of learning and community-building. Pardue describes the way in which youth groups are changing the content of what public institutions consider to be worthwhile knowledge (Pardue 2004: 412). He conducted a case study of the Foundation for the Well-Being of Minors

(FEBEM), a youth prison, to show how hip-hoppers conceive of their actions as educational and how students interpret hip-hop workshops as learning experiences that promote collectivity. Pardue (2004) describes the way in which, in such phrases as *conquistar espacio* (to conquer space), hip-hop practitioners in São Paulo have historically stressed the links between occupying space and cultural fortitude. In this case, hip-hop's value is not just about the right to occupy public space with boom boxes and powerful car stereos, it is also about restructuring institutional spaces, especially those places of discipline and surveillance (e.g. prisons) that have historically and systematically been indifferent if not hostile to popular culture in any organised fashion. As Pardue says, speaking of rappers in São Paulo, they use and rework negative terms such as *marginal* and *periphery* into their own empowering and at times positive representations (Pardue 2004: 416). For many years, La Paz was considered the country's artistic centre. Today, however, *mestizos* from La Paz travel to El Alto to watch performances at Wayna Tambo. These young *alteños*, through their participation in hip-hop, are not formalising vehicles of resistance; they maintain autonomy. The 'conquering of space' is well underway.

According to Condry (2000b), conducting research on hip-hop in Japan, young Japanese people view the hip-hop music of African-Americans as a way to distance themselves from the homogeneous mainstream, "Disaffected Japanese youth came to see the African-American as a counter to the values of the Japanese establishment, and the Black other was adopted as a symbol of defiance, forbidden fruit and their own alienation from the Japanese mainstream" (Condry 2000b: 175). In many ways, members of this culture feel more of a connection to their global hip-hop brethren than to those with closer familial or proximate ties (Kjeldgaard and Askegaard 2006). In an

interview with Condry, the Japanese hip-hop producer Como Lee states, “My hero is Stevie Wonder. He is a god. But when I watch kabuki, I feel like I’m in a foreign country (Condry 2001b: 241). They seem to be rebelling against the traditional collectives of their countries and dominant cultures while simultaneously seeking membership and identification with both the global hip-hop culture and their local hip-hop subcultures (Hui and Triandis 1986). Traditionally, due to perceived in-country homogeneity, cross-cultural researchers have relied upon country (or nationality) as a proxy for individualistic/collectivist behaviour. Recently, however, cross-cultural researchers have come to appreciate the strength of global consumer segments that transcend geographic borders (Brewer and Chen 2007). Such is the case with Japanese and Korean youth: their generational differences and the reduction of geographical distance via technology have conspired to both alienate them from their elders and align them with their electronically connected hip-hop peers with whom they share a group identity (Taifel and Turner 1979).

Whereas, in certain instances, such as those described above, the status of rappers as “youth” articulates an opposition to parents and mainstream culture, in El Alto this is certainly not the case. Hip-hop is breaking barriers and increasingly attracting the attention of the older generations. When, for so many years, parents and grandparents in El Alto would not teach their children their mother tongue for fear that they would be discriminated against, to hear these youth stand up in a public square and rap in Aymara or emphasise elements of indigenous rural culture has a powerful impact. Calestani, conducting research in El Alto between 2003 and 2004, writes of how mass media and education have influenced youth in their consumption choices and behaviour, underlining how parents and grandparents disagreed with some of the young people's

behaviour, in their dress and language. She mentions the shame associated with wearing *ponchos*, and describes the suffering and discrimination young *alteños* face at school for displaying signs of indigeneity (Calestani 2012: 546). Today, at Wayna Tambo, young rappers wear *ponchos* and *chullos* with pride, playing music combining modern techno beats and traditional instruments such as the *zampona*, *quena* and *charango* (pan-pipes, flute and small guitar) and reciting lyrics in Aymara and Quechua.

For the young *alteños* involved in hip-hop, globalisation contains elements within it which may be used in subverting colonising tendencies, for example the global reach of telecommunication technologies. Through involvement in this expressive art form, they are able to equip themselves with the skills and technology to broadcast their stories to local communities and to the world beyond, through forms such as blogs, facebook and twitter pages. *Alteño* rappers are taking advantage of new technologies by allowing people to download their latest music for free by putting their recordings on MySpace. Grover Canaviri, aged twenty-three, who sings for the Clandestines, told me *“I do not live off hip-hop, and I did not plan to.....I do not care if my music is pirated. The money is not important. What we want is to send out our lyrics so they can influence.”* Record releases and anti-racism events have also taken place in Santa Cruz, Sucre and Tarija and hip-hop can be seen and heard all over the continent. The hip-hop movement has drawn attention from bloggers, authors, researchers, and journalists from around the world. With that attention has come an increased global awareness of the issues and struggles that the youth are facing.

## Conclusion

For young people living in El Alto, indigenous culture – and particularly Aymara culture - constitutes the keystone that defines what it means to be *alteño* in the twenty-first century and, through cultural activism expressed through the media of hip-hop, young people at Wayna Tambo are making the past significant today in a myriad of innovative ways. These groups play an important role in the creation of new political understandings and in the reproduction and expansion of social struggles. New communications technology and formats have facilitated powerful collective self-expression and this expression is in itself a form of cultural revitalisation. *Alteño* hip-hop carries the potential to open up spaces to imagine - and actually create - different world views. Freire has argued that the self-depreciation of the oppressed “derives from their internalisation of the opinion the oppressors hold of them. So often do they hear that they are good for nothing.... that in the end they become convinced of their own unfitness” (Freire 1970: 63). Through processes of reflection and political expression in hip-hop, this way of thinking has begun to change. As historically marginalised people assert control over the practice of representation, they engage in a visible and frequently influential form of cultural politics by defining “the meaning and value of acts and events in the arena of inter-ethnic interaction” and by taking control of the images and meanings through which their cultures and histories are represented in local, national, and transnational locations (Turner 1990: 11). It is a process of giving back value to one's identity. Hip-hop has helped change how *alteño* youth see themselves. Wayna Tambo is enabling one of the most marginalised groups in Bolivia to participate in improving their social, political, economic and cultural environment, giving them a powerful voice, not only locally but globally.



Fig. 20: Casa de las Culturas Wayna Tambo



Fig. 21: Practice session at Wayna Tambo



**Fig. 22: Abraham Bojorquez in the recording studio at Wayna Tambo**

## Conclusion

This thesis set out to investigate the ways in which the most marginalised of young people living in the city of El Alto - those with experience of living and/or working on the street - have, in recent years, increasingly confronted their marginalisation by re-imagining indigeneity. It has addressed the multiple ways in which young people in El Alto today are responding to the challenges of everyday life, projecting their visions for the future by looking back to the history, myths, legends and practices of their ancestors for inspiration, constantly affirming and reaffirming their connections, both to the older generations - parents, grandparents - and to *Pachamama* (Mother Earth). Young *alteños* are re-imagining indigeneity both to create community and a sense of belonging and as a political tool. These young people are both 'Aymara' and 'Street'; that is to say they are both indigenous and urban. Throughout this thesis I have emphasised the ways in which young *alteños* are not only looking backwards, taking knowledge, values and practices from their past, but - and most importantly - they are using this past to go forwards, to make claims to modernity and to challenge their marginal status.

Having provided a context for the thesis in Chapter One, describing the origins and history of El Alto, its relationship with neighbouring La Paz and the ascendancy of Evo Morales to President, Chapter Two discussed the example of young people involved in the occupation of shoe-shining, demonstrating the ways in which this work may be considered a form of empowerment, a source of self-esteem and informal learning, as well as a way in which to forge strong comradeship and a sense of belonging. Chapter Three went on to discuss further the influence of Evo Morales on the involvement of young *alteños* in politics, investigating the ways in which the President emphasises his



own indigeneity so as to gain political support. Chapter Four addressed the continuing significance of the countryside and rural connections to young *alteños*; the extent to which they participate in rituals and festivals considered traditional, questioning the relevance of authenticity in this context. Finally, Chapter Five explored the politicisation of culture in the production of *alteño* hip-hop. Through this modern media form, young *alteños* are actively seeking to bring change to their community through the redefinition of their identity, one that serves as a new base for political action. Through the appropriation of hip-hop as a tool of cultural resistance, they are re-shaping a global cultural expression, ultimately using it to build a better future for their community.

Morales has acted as a catalyst but he did not begin the process of change/indigenous reawakening currently underway in Bolivia. For young *alteños*, the October 2003 Gas Wars were a more significant factor in initiating involvement in politics. These young people are playing an important role in the creation of new political understandings and in the reproduction and expansion of social struggles. Indigeneity is a construction of a particular identity which has been imposed upon natives by colonialists and which these natives have come to realise may be used as a powerful political weapon, assisting them in gaining increased access to social resources and citizenship. If Bolivia holds lessons for indigenous movements elsewhere they take form less as an example to follow than in the way indigeneity has been re-conceptualised, not only by Morales and his party, MAS, but by young people, and, more specifically, young *alteños*.

Looking back over the duration of my fieldwork and taking into account events which have occurred in the lives of my friends in El Alto since I left Bolivia, it would seem fair to say that despite the continued everyday struggles faced by young people with

experience of living and/or working on the streets, the overall living situation of the majority has improved. After seven years of economic growth averaging 4.7 per cent a year, Bolivia joined the World Bank's list of lower middle-income countries in 2012; government officials say up to a million Bolivians have entered middle-class ranks under Morales. They credit policies such as welfare payments for school children and pensioners for lifting almost a million more out of extreme poverty (Popper 2012).

The power of ethnography lies in its ability to break down preconceptions and force an engagement with the lived reality of practice (Fischer 2008: 2). Ethnography may be considered as discourse, as a genre of story telling. As discussed by Bruner (1986), ethnographies are guided by an implicit narrative structure, by a story we tell about the peoples we study. Stories give meaning to the present and enable us to see that present as part of a set of relationships involving a constituted past and future. But narratives change, all stories are partial, all meanings incomplete. There is no fixed meaning in the past, for each new telling the context varies, the audience differs, the story is modified....We continually discover new meanings. Stories construct an Indian self; narrative structures are constitutive as well as interpretive. Different narratives are foregrounded in the discourse of different historical eras. In this thesis I hope to have demonstrated the ways in which young *alteños* are currently constructing an Indian self. This Indian self is one among many possible variations and will surely change in its composition and the uses to which it is assigned. As Manrique says, the reclaiming of the 'Indian' is a step forward in the affirmation of more democratic orders, but only as long as the exclusivity proposed by those who see in the condition of 'Indian' an immutable historic essence, charged with messianic possibilities, is rejected (Manrique 2000).

In popular views, “global” entails uniformity and sameness, influenced by the norms and standards of the West (Hansen 2008: 5). This deliberately exaggerated characterisation of globalisation privileges the West as the source of economic dynamism over other local and regional influences. Such a view reduces youth responses to passive imitations, thus promoting the idea that globalisation results in homogenisation. There is no doubt that popular culture, from music to fashion, are global in their reach and have a levelling effect, yet their consequences are variable because the meanings of globalisation are always filtered through local understandings of power hierarchies. The results of this filtering process are particularly marked in urban space, where globalisation inspires both local adaptations of, and resistance to, the flows of images and values from across the world (Lewellen 2002). In the words of Marshall Berman “modernity pours us all into a maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal, of struggle and contradiction, of ambiguity and anguish, a universe in which ‘all that is solid melts into air.’” As Berman says, while the speed of change and innovation and the expansion of modernity across the globe open up apparently infinite possibilities of advancement, transformation and communication; they are also destructive of the bonds and continuities through which life previously acquired stability and coherence, thus simultaneously plunging human beings into intense experiences of fragmentation and uprootedness (Berman 1982). In El Alto this is not the case; young *alteños* are firmly rooted but not static. They are on a global route, accessing the modern using what they find valuable from their indigenous past and carrying it forward on their journey, confronting their marginalised status with resilience, determination and creativity.

## Contributions and Future Research

This thesis has explored the ways in which young *alteños* are re-imagining indigeneity and resisting marginalisation in a variety of innovative ways - from shoe-shining to participating in *ch'allas* to *Pachamama* to producing hip-hop inspired by Aymara values and traditions. Throughout the chapters the emphasis has been on young people's creativity, on the unexpected interconnections between the lives of the marginalised youth of El Alto and the current Bolivian government, and on the historic, symbolic and cultural continuity of indigenous Bolivians. In my field research and the writing of this thesis I have sought to challenge some of anthropology's normative approaches to research by using a youth-centred research methodology, enabling young people in El Alto to speak for themselves. Working with young people, the rich and complex interweaving of skills can result in their moving into new territories and making knowledge their own in unexpected ways. Anthropologists should strive to critically engage with the expertise of young people regarding the worlds they know and understand best. The meanings of research for young people must be made an explicit topic of scrutiny; new ways for them to participate in research must be created, not as objects of study but as inquirers (Nespor 1997: 370). Allowing young people to construct their own interview guides can provide a window into ideas and issues that they themselves find important or interesting and impart useful skills to them. On the whole, such ideas may not reproduce adult's expectations about young people's points of view. Thus, suggestions for questions to consider become a sort of data, even as they are instruments for collecting information (Best 2007: 279). It is often the process itself that produces the most interesting and useful knowledge. In retooling research processes and products themselves so as to be accessible to and created by young people there is much

to learn about our own discipline and the ways in which it continues to construct its objects.

Young people between 15 and 24 years of age comprise almost a quarter of the people in the developing world (World Bank 2005:1). Scholarship and policy planning that target youth in the South face a problem. Most relevant research focuses either on the urban or on youth. The two concerns are only rarely brought together. While demographers have recently devoted attention to the urban transformation of the developing world, they have not addressed the ramifications of the youth bulge in the urban population (National Research Council 2003). For example, a major commissioned study of the changing transitions from youth to adulthood in developing countries makes no reference to urban settings as the chief stage for youth lives (National Research Council and Institute of medicine 2005). Similarly, a recent overview of young people and development barely engages with urban dimensions of this problematic (Ansell 2005). Conversely, research on the urban South rarely considers youth as important players. Davis (2006), for example, attributes the problems of rapid urbanisation to lack of jobs and lack of housing. Linking urban survival to the disproportionate labour efforts of women and children, Davis recognises the youth bulge only in reference to criminalisation. Nowhere does his study support an alternative future, to the creation of which young people in the developing world are actively contributing. This simple demographic observation has complex implications for resource development, service provision, social organisation, and everyday life. Above all, the combination of youth and the city gives rise to salient questions for scholarship and program policy in general about the role of youth in the social reproduction of the cities of tomorrow.

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## **Appendices**

### **A. Questionnaire for Young Alteños**

**(Translated from Spanish)**

#### **Personal Data**

Name

Age

Where do you live?

Who do you live with?

When did your family move to El Alto?

#### **Education**

Did you go to college or university? Which one?

How long were you there? How was the experience?

If you did not complete university what were your reasons for leaving?

How important is formal education and why?

What did you learn about Aymara culture and traditions at school?

What have you learned about Aymara culture and traditions from your parents, relatives and friends?

Do you think it's important for young people to speak their native language (Aymara, Quechua or Guarani)? Explain why.

Which Aymara or Quechua legends, myths or stories do you know?

#### **Identity**

Would you say you are Aymara, Quechua, Bolivian or other? Explain

Explain why identity as Aymara, Quechua or other is important to you? Why/why not?

Are Aymara and Quechua rituals relevant today?

Which rituals do you take part in and why?

Is it important to your parents that you know your roots? Explain

How many times a year do you go to the countryside or another place in Bolivia? For what purpose?

What would you say have been the most significant changes in cultural traditions as a result of migration? Which have changed and which have been lost? Explain with examples.

Is there an El Alto identity?

Is it important to preserve cultural heritage? Explain.

## **Political**

Do you think President Morales is Aymara, Quechua, Bolivian or other? Explain.

How does Evo Morales use his Aymara identity in his quest for political change?

Should young people be interested in politics? Why/why not?

How are young people involved in politics today?

Has involvement increased with Morales as President?

Do you participate in any social or political youth groups? Explain.

What types of discrimination do youth in El Alto and the Aymara and Quechua population in general face today?

Could you say which have been the recent most significant political and social changes in El Alto and Bolivia as a whole?

What do you consider to be the aims of youth activism in El Alto?

## **Media/Culture**

Which cultural centres or youth groups do you know of in El Alto?

What is El Alto lacking culturally?

Which newspapers do you read?

Which TV channels do you watch?

Which music do you listen to?

Do you have a hero/heroine or role model? Who? Why/why not?

What is your main goal or ambition?

## **Wayna Tambo, Hip-Hop**

How did you get involved in hip-hop?

When?

Is it a hobby or work?

What aspects of Aymara culture are there in your music? (Language, concepts, nature)

What are you trying to express?

What other influences?

What do you aim to achieve with your music?

Could you describe your music as political? Explain.

As social? Explain.

Who is your music for and why?

Hip-hop comes from the US. Do you see any contradictions in your political beliefs and this connection?

Is your work related to or inspired by life of or in the street?

**B. Questionnaire for Parents and Grandparents of Young Alteños**  
**(Translated from Spanish)**

Name

Age

Address

Did you go to school?

Which and how was the experience?

Do you think formal education is important for your children? Explain.

Which languages do you speak?

Is it important for young people to speak their native language today?

What Aymara or Quechua legends, myths and stories can you tell?

When did your family first move to the city?

Why?

Where are you from (community and village)?

Would you say you are Aymara, Quechua, Bolivian or other? Explain.

Is identity as Aymara, Quechua or Bolivian important to you? Explain.

How significant are Aymara rituals and ceremonies now you have moved to the city?

In which rituals do you participate? Why? Describe.

Which would you say have been the most significant changes in cultural changes with rural to urban migration? What has changed/been lost?

Do you think it's important to preserve cultural heritage?

Do you think President Morales is Aymara, Quechua, Bolivian or other? Explain.

Which have been the most significant political and social changes in El Alto and Bolivia?

What is your work?

How many children do you have?

Where do your children live?

What is their work?

Who do you live with?

What opinions do you have about opportunities for young people in El Alto?

Should young people be interested in politics? Explain.

Is it important that your children know their roots?

What do you want for your children?

How often do you return to your native village?

For what reasons?



What advantages/disadvantages are there to living in the city?

Which rituals, beliefs, values, ideas have been brought from the villages to the city? (for example social structures, *ayllu*, *ch'allas*, *apthapi*, etc.)

Do you have neighbours in El Alto from your native village?

Is it important to you to have solidarity in the city, as in village communities? Explain.